

Trade Secrets

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Trade Secrets

by [HANNIBRAT \(moderndaylestat\)](#).

Summary

Will Graham kills people because he gets paid good money for it. Hannibal Lecter kills people because he is a serial-killing cannibal. What happens when by pure chance, these two killers end up in the same place, at the same time, targeting the same guy?

It's much easier to sabotage the growing attraction between them than to let it evolve into something serious. It's much easier to remain distant and deny feelings than to be vulnerable in front of each other. But in the end, behind all the spitefulness and venom, there is a mutual desire to be loved.

Notes

I had a thought, WHAT IF Will had chosen to become a contract killer instead of going to work at the FBI? And WHAT IF Hannibal was a lonely cannibal who likes the company of pretty men and is unapologetic about it? Read to find out what happens!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

The lovely [murdersub](#) made an amazing mood board for this fic, [check it out!](#)

There is also [this amazing fan art](#) made by [this wonderful artist](#) on Twitter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's always kind of awkward when people ask Will what he does for a living. He rotates through vague answers like "independent contractor", "removalist, of sorts", and "people pay me to solve their problems". He isn't exactly stellar at socialising, especially not when it comes to discussing jobs, so eventually, everyone stops asking. *Contract Kill Will* does have a comical ring to it, but it isn't a nickname - or an occupation, for that matter - that he can reveal to normal people. Although, having to keep the precise nature of his job secret is only a minor inconvenience compared to the very enticing paychecks Will receives, so he can't complain.

Tonight, he is perched on the roof of a warehouse overlooking a deserted dock. As expected, his target comes into view in a few minutes. Will brings his eye to the scope of his sniper rifle and follows the man's movements through the little glass magnifier. His hand is already in position, index finger resting on the trigger, itching with anticipation but not pulling it just yet, as he aligns the middle of the viewfinder with the man's head.

The man is standing on the dock, hastily loading questionable-looking cargo into a small boat. Will doesn't know what kind of cargo exactly, and he doesn't particularly care. More than likely, it has something to do with why he's been hired to get rid of this person. Will knows that his job comes with two very important unwritten rules: don't ask questions, and if you see anything you're not supposed to be seeing, keep your mouth shut.

And that is exactly what Will intends to do. He isn't concerned with other people's business, only his own. There is no one around, he's got a clear shot, and his car is parked nearby to ensure a quick getaway from the crime scene.

Overall, the job looks easy-peasy, trigger squeezy, blowing-the-brains-out kind of cheesy.

Then, out of the corner of his eye that isn't glued to the scope, Will notices something moving.

He leans forward past the gun to take a proper, unobstructed look. There is a dark, tall figure briskly approaching the dock. Will is positioned too far away to see proper details, but the mysterious person seems to be shining in the dark, moonlight reflecting off his clothes as if he's wearing a one-piece suit made entirely of transparent plastic.

Will quirks an eyebrow, internally judging such a ridiculous outfit choice. The strange man moves silently and with elegance, quickly making his way right towards Will's target, who is still too distracted depositing boxes onto the boat to notice anything going on around him.

The next thing Will sees is a smooth movement of the plastic-clad man's arm, a glint of a blade, and a spray of arterial blood erupting from the target's neck as it's sliced open. Will lets out a breath he didn't realise he's been holding. He stays still and watches, as if suspended in time and place, as the enigmatic killer drags away the gurgling and bleeding mess that was once the man Will was intending to kill.

Once they've disappeared from view, dissolving into the dark woods that line the shore, a deafening silence envelopes the dock. All Will can hear is his own heart ricocheting in his chest as he slowly but surely starts to see red.

Will is pissed.

He is *fucking furious*.

This job was going to cover his expenses for the whole upcoming month. There's mortgage and bills and Will's seven dogs that need food, as does Will himself. And now, this godforsaken knight in shining plastic has ruined it all.

His target is dead, which is good, in the grand scheme of things. But it's not *good enough*, not for Will's employer's standards. Technically, the job is done, but not by Will, so he can't take credit. Even if he tried, he doesn't have any proof to take back to his employer. He won't get paid without proof - the very specific kind of proof that his employer demands - and he knows the people in this business aren't stupid enough to just take his word for it.

He's got a meeting scheduled the day after tomorrow with a man known by the alias Z, who is Will's only point of contact for communicating with his employer. They usually meet at a park or another busy and inconspicuous location. Will hands over the discreet little package that contains the proof of a completed job, and Z gives him the cash. The arrangement is nice and simple, as long as everything goes according to plan. And it always has, for Will.

Until now.

Will didn't hit the target. Someone else did. Which means that Will failed the job. And in this line of work, failure isn't something that is tolerated at all. This isn't high school where you can turn in a half-complete assignment several days after the due date and get away with some light scolding from the teacher. Will's job is a whole different kind of institution, with a whole different kind of assignment, and he knows that if his work isn't flawlessly executed, or on time, he's most likely going to end up with a bullet planted firmly inside his skull in the next 24 hours.

So, not only is Will running out of money, but he's also in another predicament that is much more serious.

And he has until his meeting with Z to figure this out. Will has two days. Two days and too many unanswered questions.

Who is the plastic suit killer? Is he another assassin from a different employer, hired to kill the same man as Will? Or was he, perhaps, hired by Will's employer because he doesn't trust Will to complete the job? That would be highly insulting; Will has never failed an assignment, never been late or asked for an extension, and never charged more than the job warrants. Normally, he would feel offended at such disrespect towards his reputation, but instead, he feels terrified.

Will needs answers, and he needs them fast. He supposes the only person that can provide them would be the plastic suit killer.

So, he springs into action.

Will bolts down the steps leading out of the warehouse building, haphazardly separating the rifle from its mounts and shoving all components into his backpack as he sprints straight to his car. If he lets this mysterious man get away now, he'll never be able to find him again.

There is a faint rumble of another car's engine in the distance, and Will can spot a flash of grey metal pass between the trees, deducing that this must be the other killer exiting the crime scene. Will starts his own engine, keeping his headlights off in order to stay camouflaged by the darkness, and begins to discreetly follow the grey car.

Shadowing people, both driving or on foot, is a key skill required for Will's job - besides the trigger-pulling, obviously. He's done this so many times before that it's easy to maintain the precise balance of staying close enough where he can see the vehicle that is his new target, but far enough where it doesn't create suspicion. He follows the killer all the way to the centre of Baltimore and watches the car disappear into the garage of a rather prestigious-looking property. Will imprints the address into his memory, so that he can do his research and come back later.

Being quick and efficient at finding personal information about targets is another skill every contract killer needs to have. By the next morning, Will has determined that the man residing at 317 Rivington Drive, Baltimore, Maryland is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He snorts as he learns that Dr. Lecter's day occupation is psychiatrist; those poor people have no idea that they're receiving therapy from a cold-blooded murderer. What an absolute disgrace to the Hippocratic oath, Will thinks with a chuckle.

He spends the rest of the day watching this so-called psychiatrist, following his movements from the house to the clinic he owns and back. Will noticed the previous night that the suburb is rather affluent, but now, in broad daylight, it fully dawns on him how obscenely wealthy Dr. Lecter is. Not only does his residence look spacious and extravagant, but he also drives a Bentley that probably cost five times more than Will's car. If he were a thief, this would've been a goldmine. Fortunately for Dr. Lecter, Will's only intentions are to snoop around the house to find answers as to who the man is behind the psychiatrist facade.

Breaking and entering is the third skill every assassin needs in order to be successful, which is why Will always brings his lock-picking tools to every stakeout. The tools are invaluable when it comes to getting into buildings and roofs, to find secluded spots with stable horizontal surfaces to mount his sniper rifle onto.

From his hiding place, Will sees that Dr. Lecter leaves his lavish residence around dinner time. Does he have a dinner date? Is he going out to kill another unfortunate soul? Will doesn't know, nor does he care. A perfect opportunity has presented itself in the form of the empty house, and he has to stay focused.

Picking the back door of Dr. Lecter's extravagant property is a piece of cake, as is disarming the security alarm. Will steps inside, making sure to move silently, just in case. He glides swiftly past the sumptuous dining hall, making his way towards a large space that looks like the living room. The house is gigantic and has many rooms, making it seem like a maze. Or a museum, perhaps, considering the plethora of antique furniture and ancient-looking art pieces everywhere. Will only has a small flashlight to illuminate his way, and he flicks the beam of light along the long corridor, searching for a room where one would hide information pertaining to their secret identity as a killer.

Will soon discovers a small study with a pristine-looking wooden desk, which seems like something he's looking for. He creeps into the room, wondering if the desk drawers will have hidden compartments that he'll need to uncover. Or, if Dr. Lecter has a safe here somewhere. That would be a major setback for Will, since his lock-picking tools can't open safes. He makes his way to the desk, gloved hand curling around the knob of the first drawer.

Will sincerely hopes that he is able to quickly find what he's looking for and leave the house undetected. He has to meet Z in just over 24 hours, which means he most likely won't get another opportunity to snoop around Dr. Lecter's residence like this. He prays to every god and goddess he knows, asking for luck to be on his side in this risky endeavour. As Will searches through the contents of the drawer, he contemplates whether he should be praying to the devil instead. He doubts the gods in heaven would like him very much considering that he kills other people for money.

Suddenly, there is a voice behind him.

"Good evening, Mr. Graham. I don't believe we've met before."

Will flinches and turns on his heels at the speed of a Formula 1 car. The flashlight slips from his grip, hitting the floor with a clattering sound. Miraculously, it doesn't switch off, and the beam of light faintly illuminates the doorway where Dr. Lecter is standing, his figure looming tall and dangerous.

Will's heart sinks to his stomach, then down to his feet, past the floor, burrowing six feet under, and settling into his imminent grave. The rest of his body will likely follow soon, now that he's been caught digging around a killer's house. Clearly, said killer was expecting him, lying in wait in the shadows of his seemingly empty house. The man knows Will's name, which means he's researched Will just as much as Will has researched him.

Wow. The gods must really fucking hate him.

Will swallows hard, grits his teeth and clears his throat, just to make sure that when he speaks, his voice comes through unwavering and unafraid.

"Consider this an introduction, then, Dr. Lecter."

Will knows how to play the game. It's all about appearing bold, confident and fearless, no matter how petrified he is on the inside. He forces his muscles to relax and arranges his limbs into an unbothered, casual stance, looking the man in front of him dead in the eyes.

Dr. Lecter's finger brushes the lightswitch, and the ceiling light turns on, presumably so that Will can see just how malevolent and lethal he is. Though, Will is secretly thankful for the well-lit room, because he isn't particularly excellent at hand-to-hand combat to begin with, and fighting in the dark would be straight-up suicide. Will braces his body before the imminent attack, but almost a minute passes and it doesn't happen, so he lets his eyes slowly wander up and down Dr. Lecter's body.

He's dressed in a deep maroon suit with golden accents, accompanied by a floral print tie of matching shades. His dark hair is streaked with blond and grey, meticulously parted and combed to the side. Will knows the man has an expensive taste, but he didn't expect him to look like a goddamn model from a high-class men's formalwear advertisement. Dr. Lecter is the very definition of refined style; every part of his appearance is perfectly put together, and he carries himself with such dignity and grace that only gods can possess.

And then, there's his face. Flawless skin, sharp jawline, high cheekbones, overall the kind of look that would make your heart stop. Figuratively or literally. Dr. Lecter's eyes are dark brown, rich and decadent like aged artisan chocolate; though, probably laced with venom that would poison you instantly. Judging by the way he expertly cut a man's throat at the dock, Will deduces it isn't the first time he's killed. Will wonders how many unsuspecting people have fallen for those deliciously dangerous eyes, or for the generally handsome appearance. Is this how he lures in his victims, seducing them with his attractive face and thick wallet?

The entire time Will is lost in his musings, Dr. Lecter continues to appraise him with unrestrained curiosity. His gaze is apprehensive and calculating. *Intrigued*.

"I presume that you're not here to steal from me, otherwise you would've pocketed my antiques already," he speaks.

The voice matches everything that Will has already learned about the man; it's smooth and poised, with the kind of a respectable and domineering timbre that makes people subconsciously bow their heads whenever he talks. But not Will.

"Correct," Will answers, raising his chin in defiance.

Dr. Lecter tilts his head to the side, sharp eyes burrowing into Will, intending to penetrate him to the core and see what he's truly made of. But Will's mask of cool courage doesn't crumble under that piercing gaze, doesn't even crack. In his line of work, Will has had to deal with all kinds of intimidation that's way worse than this. He wouldn't have been able to earn his reputation as an esteemed assassin and attain high-paying clients if he wasn't capable of holding his ground, asserting his terms and price in a way that's non-negotiable, and challenging those who dare to undervalue his work.

Even if the situation Will currently finds himself in is terrifying him to the bone, there is no way in hell he's going to let it show.

“What is it that you’re looking for, then?” Dr. Lecter enquires.

What Will expected as he came face to face with this aristocratic killer was a vicious fight to the death, not a suspiciously peaceful interrogation. He is much more accustomed to handling his business from metres away with a sniper rifle, not up close and personal. Although Dr. Lecter hasn’t yet tried to close the distance between them, the situation makes Will feel rather claustrophobic. He’s uncomfortable, but at least he isn’t dead, *yet*, so perhaps that says something.

“I need answers,” Will says, for lack of a better response in the moment.

“What are your questions? Please, humour me.”

Dr. Lecter’s lips curve into a small smile, a tight quirk of his lips that’s deceitful without a doubt, just like his eyes. Everything about the man exudes an air of complacency and arrogance that unnerves Will. He sure has the home couch advantage, but Will isn’t going to go down without a fight. Though, he’s strongly inclined to do everything in his power to avoid ending up in a fight, as the consequences of such an event would undoubtedly be fatal to one or both of them.

So, Will decides to keep talking. He crosses his arms in front of his chest, narrows his eyes and challenges the man’s smug smile with his own, putting a cocky and unimpressed expression on his face.

“Who do you work for?” Will asks coolly.

Dr. Lecter quirks an eyebrow in slight amusement at the question.

“Only myself.”

As if Will is going to believe that.

“I’m not talking about your psychiatry clinic,” he presses, rolling his eyes.

“I know exactly what you’re talking about, Mr. Graham,” the man in front of him counters without batting an eye, “The answer remains: only myself.”

Now, it’s Will’s turn to raise his eyebrows.

“So, you’re saying that what I saw you do at the dock yesterday wasn’t *a job assignment*?”

“Yes. A leisure activity, rather.”

Will’s eyes narrow even further and he feels irritation creep up his spine and tighten his already tense muscles.

“Your leisure activity just cost me five fucking figures,” he spits out.

He doesn’t want to know what personal reasons Dr. Lecter would’ve had to kill the guy that was Will’s target. Hell, he doesn’t want to know what kind of man thinks of killing people as

leisure. He feels the irritation inside him turn into anger, igniting a hellfire of wrath directed at this stranger with his ridiculous plastic one-piece, who not only stopped Will from getting paid but potentially also ruined his relationship with his employer.

Will wants to punch all the elegance and perfect composure off the bastard's face. Maybe even slit his throat just like he did to the man that was supposed to be Will's paycheck. An eye for an eye. Dr. Lecter may have tricked and cornered him, but Will has a gun tucked in the waistband of his black jeans, and he isn't afraid to use it. He pulls triggers for a living, after all.

The violent images in Will's mind are interrupted by Dr. Lecter speaking again.

"Wouldn't that mean I did you a favour? You can claim him as one of yours, I won't object," he offers.

What, Mr. Plastic Suit is trying to be nice all of the sudden?

"Too late for that," Will scoffs, "My employer needs proof. Proof from the body."

Dr. Lecter considers him for a moment, as if trying to decide whether to tell the truth or lie, weighing up the risks and rewards of his honesty.

"What do you need from the body?" he asks eventually.

"Anything. The gnarlier the better."

Normally, Will's clients request something tame like photos as proof, but his regular employer is a sick fuck who keeps body parts of his victims as trophies. One time, Will delivered him a gouged out eyeball. Z had been so mortified that it shone through his usual facade of indifference, but as Will learned later, his employer had been very pleased with the gift. So yes, the gnarlier the better.

"Would a kidney suffice?" Dr. Lecter sounds astonishingly casual, as if asking how Will likes his coffee.

A kidney? A *fucking kidney*? Who would be deranged and sadistic enough to rip a body open and extract a whole organ like that? Certainly not Will. He only took the eyeball because it happened to fall out on its own, probably an indirect courtesy of where his bullet hit. Usually, Will chooses easy trophies like teeth or skull fragments, because those can be removed fairly effortlessly and with minimal amount of savage force.

"A kidney?" Will repeats, still in disbelief.

Dr. Lecter's nonchalant expression doesn't falter.

"Do you want it or not?"

Will conceals a shudder and nods. The man disappears into the dark, his footsteps echoing down the corridor until they can't be heard anymore.

Will considers running, just taking off, sprinting to the door and out, never looking back. He can get away unharmed and pretend all of this was just a hellish nightmare.

Though, then, he'd still have the problem of having nothing to deliver to his employer and having to face the ugly consequences of failing that assignment. Besides, it's utterly absurd that Dr. Lecter hasn't killed him yet, and is in fact helping him with his problem. A blessing in disguise? Will is curious to find out, which is why he stays put.

Several minutes later, Dr. Lecter returns, holding a small tightly-wrapped bundle. Encased by transparent plastic, there is a reddish brown bean-shaped mass. It looks like those professionally packaged meat products you get from a butcher, for god's sake. Will just stares, unable to even blink, as the kidney is placed into his hand. The organ is cold to the touch, and Will deduces it must have come from the freezer.

"Are you eating him or something?" Will huffs, unable to stop an incredulous laugh escaping from his mouth at the thought.

Again, Dr. Lecter seems unfazed by Will's dumbfounded reaction.

"Would it alarm you if I was?" he queries, tone perfectly neutral.

"No," Will replies, quickly regaining his composure. "I don't meet many *cannibals* in my line of work. I'm just... intrigued."

Of course this eccentric guy is a goddamn cannibal. He's got an odd sense of style and a very unorthodox taste for leisure activities, so it would make sense for him to have an unconventional diet too. Will has seen a lot of sick and twisted people during his time of being a contract killer, as well as in his previous job as a New Orleans cop, but he hasn't yet seen *this*. With his stunning looks and an overall charming demeanor, it seems that Dr. Lecter is able to flip the concept of 'sick and twisted' upside down and turn it into something weirdly enticing and tasteful.

Maybe Will is a deranged sadist after all, for being fascinated instead of repulsed by this organ-eating monster of a man.

"Since my lifestyle seems to have piqued your interest, I'd like to have you for dinner some time," Dr. Lecter says then.

Unable to keep it down anymore, Will breaks into a loud, almost hysterical laugh. The harsh, sneering sound falls from his lips and fills the otherwise quiet room, bouncing off the walls. It's a nervous, disbelieving and plain cynical laughter; a perfect representation of the bizarre situation he's in.

Dr. Lecter isn't as clever as he looks. Will can immediately see the hidden threat that the seemingly harmless invitation to dinner contains.

It's ridiculous, it's hilarious, and it's un-fucking-believable. Hence, the only natural reaction for Will is to laugh.

“You want to have me for dinner as the dish. Not as the guest,” he points out sardonically, shaking his head.

“Quite the contrary,” Dr. Lecter objects, pursing his lips and looking mildly displeased that Will thought he had sinister motives, “I have no intention of eating you.”

“Why did you invite me then?”

“As you would probably know, this lifestyle we lead makes us prone to loneliness. I would appreciate the company.”

Now, that’s a statement Will can relate to. Having close friends, let alone a romantic partner, in his line of work is a *liability*, something he can’t afford to have. Will tells himself that the loneliness doesn’t bother him, that he doesn’t long for companionship, that he’s not built to be a social person. Perhaps, in a different world, in a different kind of job, he would stay in contact with his family, have a wide circle of friends, and maybe get a boyfriend or girlfriend. Or a husband or wife, even.

But not in this life. Getting close to another person would mean putting them at risk of being used as a gambling chip, if Will were to piss off the big bosses. He’s chosen this dangerous life for himself, knowing the risks and rewards, but he would never let anyone else get entangled in it.

As an established freelance assassin, the only kind of company over dinner Will can picture himself having would be... well, another killer. And if Will is perfectly honest with himself, Dr. Lecter wouldn’t be bad company. Quite the opposite; he is incredibly well-mannered, intelligent and pleasant to talk to. And the way he looks at Will with his dark eyes is insatiable, almost lustful, and makes Will’s body heat up in return.

Since when has he found murderers attractive?

Will finds it difficult to blame himself though; Dr. Lecter has a very handsome face and a lean, muscular body. The suit he’s wearing is making it hard to see, but Will can tell he must be physically fit, based on how effortlessly he killed a man and lifted his body into the trunk. An all-round great partner, if it weren’t for the fact that he’s a killer.

Then again, so is Will.

Will has to consciously halt his thoughts to prevent them from getting too far ahead, sneaking off into the dangerous territory of wishful thinking. Whatever Dr. Lecter has in mind isn’t a date. They don’t even know each other. Hell, they might still be trying to kill each other. Just because Will has been invited to have dinner with the man - as colleagues, for lack of a better term - it doesn’t mean he won’t end up being the next body in Dr. Lecter’s trunk and the next meat dish on his table.

“Are you available on Thursday evening, 6 o’clock?” the man queries, breaking Will out of his musings.

Will takes a moment to deliberate whether he should accept or decline the invitation, trying to determine which of the two options would result in the smallest likelihood of him being murdered by a killer that is so desperate for company. He deduces that if he agrees to join Dr. Lecter for dinner in a few days, at least he will walk out of this house unharmed tonight. Then, later, he will be able to decide what to make of this rather unexpected turn of events, and whether he's actually going to follow through with the dinner plans.

Will casts his eyes upwards, as if trying to recall his schedule in order to give the man an answer. Though, he knows very well that he doesn't have any plans. Will never has any plans. He spends all his free time fishing, looking after his dogs, and occasionally repairing boat motors, just to make it look like he has a normal day job.

"Yeah, I'm free," Will responds with a small smile, one that shows he's interested, but not *too* interested.

"I will see you then, Mr. Graham," Dr. Lecter concludes, giving him a smile in return.

Though, it isn't just a smile, it's an entire performance. As his eyes meet Will's, the man runs a tongue over his lips and then parts them, revealing a neat row of teeth, pearl-white pointy canines shining in the moonlight. It makes Will think of Dracula, charming and mysterious, with his wealthy castle and taste for blood.

As he parts with Dr. Lecter for the night and lets his feet carry him out into the cold night air, he wonders what that mouth would taste like.

Maybe, on Thursday night at 6 o'clock, Will is going to get murdered in that extravagant house, cursing himself for being naive and allowing himself to be seduced by that endearing smile. Or maybe, he's going to kill Dr. Lecter before he can get to Will. Or maybe, if the stars align and Will gets lucky, they're going to give each other *little deaths* of a whole different kind.

Chapter End Notes

A standing shout out and a big thank you for my lovely beta [memequeen1127](#). Your feedback is invaluable ♥

Feel free to follow me on [twitter](#), I'm always looking for fellow Fannibals to talk to!

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Hannibal sets down his fork and looks Will right in the eyes. His golden-brown irises give way to rapidly enlarging pupils as his eyes lock onto Will's, the same way the scope of Will's sniper rifle zeroes on the target.

“Did I not say that I would strip you after serving you dinner?” the man asks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

How does one dress for a date — no, *just a dinner* — with a serial killer?

Will rummages through the contents of his closet in a frustrated frenzy. He discovers that he owns exactly one nice dress shirt. It's salmon-coloured and a little big on him, but paired with slicked back hair and a charming smile, it shouldn't look too bad.

Next, pants. Will settles on simple black slacks. They're truly a must-have for everyone's wardrobe; figure-hugging and formal enough for fancy dinner parties, but simultaneously stretchy and comfortable to dress in for contract kill missions. Maybe it's incredibly practical to own an all-purpose pair of pants, or maybe Will is just uncultured and thinks it's socially acceptable to wear the same pants every time he leaves the house. Either way, this whole dilemma of dressing up for dinner shouldn't be a big deal.

But it feels like it is.

It totally feels like he needs to look good for his date. No, *not a date*. His business acquaintance? His colleague? There is no name for the strange relationship he has with Dr. Lecter. Will just knows that the two times that he's seen him, he was dressed with impeccable taste; tailored three-piece suits, perfectly colour-matched ties, and polished shoes. That means Will has to look presentable too, if not to impress the man, then to fit in with the aristocratic atmosphere of Dr. Lecter's colossal residence.

Will checks himself out in the mirror and takes a sip of his favourite liquid courage. When he delivered the kidney — generous courtesy of his new cannibal friend — to his employer, the man was very impressed and rewarded Will with an extra few hundred dollars on top of the agreed-upon paycheck. So, Will used that money to treat himself to a good-quality bottle of whiskey.

The alcohol calms his nervousness regarding going to Dr. Lecter's house, but has the complete opposite effect on a different part of Will. Thinking about the man's attractive face, muscular body and smooth voice fills Will's stomach with a rather exciting feeling.

Great. Not only does he have the ugliest occupation in the world, but he also has very questionable taste in men, since he's agreed to have dinner with another killer. Could his life get any weirder?

"Good evening, Mr. Graham," Dr. Lecter greets, stepping to the side so Will can enter the house.

As predicted, he is wearing a three-piece suit, this time navy with a slight metallic shimmer. Every inch of his appearance is meticulously put together, down to the cobalt-blue cufflinks that perfectly match the shade of his tie. Overall, he is sinfully attractive, and Will isn't sure if he likes the clothes because they compliment Dr. Lecter's natural handsomeness or hates them for hiding most of the man's body from view.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter," Will replies smoothly.

His nostrils immediately catch a delicious smell coming from the dining room. Then again, delicious is probably not the most sensible word to use, considering that the man who is cooking him dinner is a literal people-eater. Is he going to serve human meat tonight? Will is intrigued.

"You look rather debonair tonight," Dr. Lecter says and helps Will out of his coat, like a gentleman he is. "However, I must note that it's rude to bring a gun to a dinner."

Will doesn't react, except for a quirk of his eyebrow. He's never been caught out like that before, especially in such an oddly calm and nonchalant manner. He gives Dr. Lecter an once-over with his eyes and notices something peculiar in the man's posture.

"It's rude to open the door while holding a knife," Will counters boldly.

Dr. Lecter's smile is all teeth; sharp and dangerous. It makes Will's legs feel weak, but not just with fear.

"Very well," he concedes.

Will watches as the man smoothly takes out a scalpel that was hidden somewhere in his clothing — his sleeve, Will suspects — and sets it on top of a cabinet by the front door with a dull clink. It's not quite the kind of weapon Will expected to see, but he was close enough in guessing the man's intentions. Who the fuck carries a scalpel around? With his plastic suits and wannabe-surgeon habits, Dr. Lecter is becoming more and more eccentric with every passing second.

"Please, Mr. Graham," Dr. Lecter speaks again, his smile so wide and saccharine and his voice so sickly-sweet and coaxing that it borders on terrifying.

He taps the top of the cabinet with his fingers; a seemingly innocent gesture that speaks volumes, infuriatingly insistent and even condescending. Is it really that obvious that Will has a gun tucked into his waistband? He rolls his eyes and places his weapon beside the scalpel. Dr. Lecter may be trying to engage him in some weird power play, but Will isn't stupid enough to bring *just* a gun with him.

"Happy now?" Will questions and raises his chin, "Or are you going strip search me for more concealed weapons?"

Dr. Lecter's poised demeanour doesn't waver under Will's provocation.

"I pride myself on having impeccable manners, Mr. Graham. I would never consider stripping you without serving you dinner first."

And there it is; Will is so obviously, blatantly and shamelessly being hit on by a serial killer. And if there was even the slightest chance that he misinterpreted the man's intentions, the way Dr. Lecter smiles at him disputes that possibility completely.

By now, Will is used to being intimidated by the most ruthless kind of people in the business and having to pass their tests before they deem him cut-throat enough to trust with their gun-for-hire endeavours. What he isn't used to, though, is being *flirted with* by a man of such caliber. As absurdly thrilling as it may be, Will isn't going to let the act throw him off guard. Maybe it's just another test he needs to pass, to prove how tough and daring he is.

Several years ago, before he had strayed onto the path of killing people for money, Will may have blushed and averted his eyes when faced with such attempts at seduction. But that isn't the man he is anymore. The Will Graham that he is now is hardened, smug, and not easily daunted.

"Oh, so you've thought about stripping me," Will challenges with a chuckle, "Is that why you invited me here?"

"I was hoping to strip down to our first names, at the very least," Dr. Lecter replies mildly.

With that, the tension in the room drops as quickly as it initially sparked. *Backing down already, Mr. Cannibal?* Maybe the man isn't as domineering as Will initially thought.

"Sure, *Hannibal*," Will responds in a light tone. He makes sure to emphasise the name; a way of showing that he's researched the man thoroughly and no introductions are necessary.

"Glad you agree, *Will*."

The man asserts dominance back by highlighting that he knows Will's name too. Will resists the urge to roll his eyes.

"What are we having?" he asks as he follows Hannibal to the dining room.

He'd seen the large dining space once before when he crept around the house in the darkness, but now, with the lights on, it looks even more lavish and extravagant. The centrepiece of the long table is a magnificent arrangement made of antlers and flowers. Judging by the number

of different forks and knives laid out just for the two of them, Will figures that he must be in for at least a three-course meal.

“For entree, we have smoked salmon and caviar canapes. For the main course, roasted and rolled loin with peach and watercress salad. And after that we will have dessert, of course.”

Out of the decadent-sounding foods mentioned, one particular word piques Will’s interest.

“What kind of loin?” he asks, lip quirking upwards into a curious grin.

“Mr. Murphy’s presence is far more pleasant on the table than at the table,” Hannibal responds smoothly, with a small wink that Will just barely catches out of the corner of his eye.

He recognises the name as belonging to the unlucky man whose demise led to him and Hannibal meeting. Will didn’t know Mr. Murphy personally — he never does with his targets — so he simply has to trust Hannibal’s word that the man was indeed atrocious company. Will wonders why exactly he ended up as a dish on Hannibal’s dinner table, but he doesn’t ask. His line of work has taught him never to ask questions of that nature.

Hannibal’s cooking tastes just as delicious as it looks and smells, and the canapes quickly disappear into their mouths as they engage in light small-talk. Although the appetiser course is more than delightful, Will can’t wait for the infamous loin. Eating human meat is a chilling and disturbing concept; something he didn’t think he’d ever encounter. On second thought, what in Will’s life isn’t disturbing? He is already going to hell for his crimes against humanity, so what more harm can some casual cannibalism do?

Poor Mr. Murphy’s loin is served on two large plates, artistically garnished with vegetables and a swirl of sauce. It tastes much like a regular pork loin, only slightly tougher and stringier. If Will didn’t know what — or rather, *whom* — he was eating, he wouldn’t think to question it. That said, what if Hannibal isn’t really a cannibal and is simply playing tricks on Will? That would be the exact kind of a sick joke a bizarre man like him would pull.

Human or not, Will enjoys the meal tremendously and finishes everything on his plate. He doesn’t get to attend luxurious dinners like this very often, and his own cooking skills are quite subpar, to put it mildly.

“You never specified what dessert we’re having,” Will notes, leaning back in his chair and eyeing Hannibal with the lazy curiosity of a sated animal.

“How so, dear Will? I thought I made it perfectly clear,” Hannibal responds, genuine amusement dancing across his features.

“Uh. No you didn’t,” Will counters. The form of endearment Hannibal used in front of his name makes him frown.

Hannibal sets down his fork and looks Will right in the eyes. His golden-brown irises give way to rapidly enlarging pupils as his eyes lock onto Will’s, the same way the scope of Will’s sniper rifle zeroes on the target.

“Did I not say that I would strip you after serving you dinner?” the man asks.

“*Oh.*” Will exhales slowly as the realisation dawns over him.

All the while, Hannibal continues to look at him with a dark glint in his eyes. It’s something calculating, something carnivorous, like a predator ready to lunge. And as Will holds his gaze, he remembers that this isn’t just his paranoia talking; he is quite literally staring into the eyes of a killer.

It makes him feel like prey, like a target, like being on the wrong end of the gun barrel. The feeling is so unbearable that Will blurts out the first thing he can think of to break the tension.

“What? You gonna lick whipped cream off my stomach or something like that?” he shoots back with a teasing smirk.

“I would be perfectly content to settle for more traditional acts, but your suggestion can certainly be incorporated if you so desire.”

Will snorts. Engaging in sensual food play with a *cannibal* is an all-round bad idea. Will may be eager to get to know Hannibal better, on a physical level for starters, but he isn’t going to be plain reckless when doing so.

“Maybe later,” he replies sarcastically.

“In that case, please allow me a moment to clear the plates. I’ll join you in the lounge in a minute. In the meantime, you are welcome to get acquainted with my humble selection of liquor, over at the back wall,” Hannibal suggests, standing up gracefully.

Will nods and saunters into the lounge room. Considering that everything Hannibal owns is over-the-top extravagant, Will guesses that the said ‘humble’ liquor collection is anything but humble. Although he loves a good glass of wine after dinner as much as everyone else, it’s not a wise idea to numb his body and mind with alcohol while he’s visiting a serial killer’s house. Neither of them has mentioned anything relating to their shared murderous tendencies at all tonight, but it doesn’t mean Hannibal’s intentions are pure. Will figures that it’s better to keep his reflexes fast and his thinking sharp.

Hannibal appears to be single, which is a red flag, all things considered. Maybe the man’s favourite pastime is to seduce and sleep with unsuspecting people, followed by killing and eating them. Maybe Will’s own flesh is going to provide the meat for the next unfortunate man or woman invited to have dinner at Hannibal’s place, and the fucked-up chain of cannibalism and murder will keep going forever?

Will looks around the room in an apprehensive fashion as he waits for his host to return, impatiently tapping his foot and fidgeting with his hands. Among all the lavish vintage furniture, there is an old but pristine-looking harpsichord that catches Will’s eye.

He’d tried teaching himself to play piano, way before deciding that his fingers are better suited for pulling triggers than pressing black and white keys. He misses playing sometimes,

and besides, nothing would paint him as more confident and fearless in Hannibal's eyes than touching his belongings without explicit permission. So, Will runs his hand over the harpsichord keys, producing a melodic cascade of sound.

"I see that you are good with your fingers," a suave voice says right next to his ear.

Will instantly spins around, ending up face to face with Hannibal, their noses less than half a metre away from each other. *Fuck, stop sneaking up on me like that*, he wants to hiss, but restrains himself. There is no way he can appear easily startled, because that implies weakness and vulnerability; the two things that Will isn't. He resorts to simply glaring at the man, hoping to god his racing heart can't be heard in the silence of the room.

"My job requires a steady finger," Will responds, masking his uneasiness with a dark chuckle.

As he peels his eyes off Hannibal's face, Will notices that he is cornered between the harpsichord and the man's body. Evidently, Hannibal notices it too. He gives Will a smirk and reaches to grip the edge of the instrument with his hands, arms outstretched on each side of Will, trapping him further.

"You should show me what else those fingers can do," Hannibal purrs, his voice resonating in the small space between them, making the hairs on the back of Will's neck stand up.

He wants to scoff at the horribly cheesy pick-up line, but realising how close Hannibal is makes Will's breath hitch in his throat. He can feel the heat radiating from Hannibal's body, can sense the carnal hunger in his eyes, can practically *smell* the lust in the air. It's obvious to Will what the man desires, just like it's obvious that he reciprocates those desires. If the charged atmosphere in the room is crystal-clear to him, it means Hannibal knows it too, reading Will's body language like an open book. And Will doesn't like being read.

He places his palms flat against Hannibal's chest, sliding them down and glances up at the man from underneath his dark eyelashes. An act of seduction, or one that Will could easily make seem as such, curious to see if Hannibal would fall for it. He completes the picture with a slow lick of his lips as he stares into the man's eyes.

Hannibal's smirk widens and he leans further into Will's space, undoubtedly eager for more contact. And that's when Will tenses his arms and *pushes*, sending Hannibal stumbling back.

"Cut the crap, Hannibal. If you want to fuck so badly, just say it," he sneers, lifting his chin as a challenge.

Hannibal steadies himself in less than a second, but Will still catches a streak of surprise flash across his face. Good, because Will is hellbent on keeping the man on his toes.

Hannibal's jaw tightens and his hands twitch, which makes Will immediately reconsider his small victory, wondering if his audacity is going to get him killed there and then. But then, the man's tranquil composure is back.

“I would never express my intentions in such a distasteful and vulgar way,” Hannibal responds, pursing his lips, “I value good manners above everything else.”

“And I value being blunt, unceremonious, and right to the point,” Will cuts in, unable to hold back his cheeky tongue now that he’s gotten started, “You have 10 seconds to get out of that suit, or I’m leaving.”

Hannibal narrows his eyes and regards Will with a scathing, albeit intrigued expression. Although he is visibly displeased with the way Will is conducting himself, he obeys the direction nonetheless, shrugging off his suit jacket in an elegant motion. His movements are unhurried, the jacket alone taking longer than ten seconds. A compromise, of sorts, Will deduces; the man wants to get laid, but on his own terms.

“It would be much easier for both of us if you relinquished your unruly attitude, Will,” Hannibal chides as he continues undressing at the same leisurely pace. “I understand the need to maintain facades, even more so in an unfamiliar environment where you feel inferior. Let me assure you that this evening will go more smoothly if you stop trying to be difficult on purpose.”

Facades? Inferior? Who does Hannibal think he is to dissect Will like that? And quite accurately so, if he dares to admit it to himself.

Then Will remembers that Hannibal is a psychiatrist, and it all makes sense. Regardless, though, he doesn't like being analyzed. He despises all kinds of shrinks with their prying eyes and invasive questions, trying to pin labels on him. There are a lot of things wrong with him and he knows it — being a hitman isn't even the worst of it. Will hates it all with a burning passion, and he's going to make it adamantly clear.

“Oh, feeling threatened, doctor?” he drawls with a cocky smile on his face.

There is no verbal response from Hannibal, but he moves with the speed of light, and the next second Will finds himself bent at the waist over the harpsichord, his face pressed against the polished wooden surface. An inaudible *‘fuck’* escapes from his lips as he feels a hand firmly grip the back of his neck and another settle between his shoulder blades, pinning him in place.

“Although I am courteous, you should not mistake me for being docile.” Hannibal’s voice is low and even. Dangerous. Like the calm before the storm.

His hold on Will doesn't budge, and Will winces. Not because it hurts, but more so because it feels humiliating. He would've preferred for it to hurt, being manhandled like that, but it didn't. He wasn't brutally slammed down, but rather swiftly maneuvered. A display of force, clearly, but more specifically, a display of *controlled* force.

Even now, Hannibal's hands aren't crushing him, but applying just enough pressure to put Will in his place. As if Will is going to submit that easily.

“Shouldn't you undress me first before bending me over?” Will grunts with a wide, teasing grin.

He lets out a snide laugh too, mainly to distract himself from the looming possibilities of what could happen next. Has he been so much of a smug smartass that Hannibal is going to take him right here and now, by simply pulling down his pants and going in dry? The idea doesn't make Will feel very comfortable, and he can't help an anxious shiver running through his body.

Then, the solid grip of Hannibal's hands is gone, and in his periphery, Will sees the man pull back and resume removing his clothes in an unbothered fashion, as if nothing happened.

"Bending you over isn't my intention," Hannibal elaborates as Will straightens up, eyeing him warily.

His upper body is now completely bare, the smooth skin attracting Will's gaze like a magnet. Hannibal's muscles are toned to perfection, all the way from the curvature of his abdomen to the well-defined and strong biceps. The faint scars littering his torso — unexpected complications during his murderous endeavours, no doubt — and the light hair that tastefully covers his chest complete the picture of the savage and lethal beast that the man is.

Will's hands are itching to touch. To bait until the beast bites again. To see if he will ever bite so hard that Will recoils in genuine fear.

He doesn't touch, though. Not yet.

"What is then?" Will asks instead, closing the distance between them.

He tucks his face under Hannibal's chin, to nuzzle the side of his neck. Except that there's still no touching, only *teasing*; the just-barely-there sensation of Will's lips ghosting above the hot skin.

Hannibal growls, a deep rumble in his chest, and Will feels himself being pushed backwards, still chest to chest with the other man, and tipped off balance onto a vintage chaise longue by the wall. His back meets the smooth plush, and it feels like he's floating atop the soft material, until the feeling is curbed by the heavy weight of Hannibal straddling his hips.

"You'll see," he murmurs, quick fingers already halfway through unbuttoning Will's shirt.

With his and Hannibal's efforts combined, the shirt ends up on the floor in mere seconds, followed by Will's slacks, shoes, socks and underwear. The air in the room is cold, and Will can feel the chill everywhere on his naked body. Well, everywhere except his groin. The warm sensation of pleasant anticipation that has been brewing there all day is now slowly becoming more heated, solidifying his arousal.

As his brain registers his nude state, Will instinctively wants to curl in on himself and to cover his crotch with his hands. But he fights the urge, instead demonstratively stretching out on the chaise, crossing his arms behind his head and giving Hannibal a sultry look; an unspoken question of *Like what you see?*

And judging by how Hannibal's pupils dilate, turning his eyes into ravenous black voids, he definitely, *definitely*, likes what he sees. The man quickly rids himself of the remainder of his

clothes, while Will watches with an amused smirk how Hannibal's always so elegant movements are now slightly more hurried and haphazard. Once he is completely unclothed, still sitting on Will's thighs, he stills.

Will cocks an eyebrow. "Show me, then."

And that's when the predator shows his teeth.

He lunges forward, strong arms gripping Will's shoulders and lifting them off the chaise with the pure force of the motion, as his lips latch onto Will's neck. Hannibal bites down, hard, and as much as Will knew to expect it, he still yelps at the sting and his hands fly up to wrench Hannibal's head back by pulling his hair. There is a slight red tinge glistening on Hannibal's teeth, and a similar shade of crimson flashes across his eyes.

Will groans at the throb on the side of his throat, realizing that the man drew blood — *fucking Dracula* — and he opens his mouth to spit out something witty and bitter, but Hannibal grinds their hips together, and Will's mind goes blank. The motion makes their cocks slide against each other, sending sparks up Will's spine.

"You taste delectable, as I predicted," Hannibal hums, running his tongue over his teeth, as if savouring the flavour.

Will rolls his eyes.

"Now, since you're so eager to use your mouth..." Will lets his eyes finish the sentence, moving them to look down at his erection meaningfully.

Did he really just encourage a goddamn cannibal to blow him? It's a rather risqué move, but there's no stopping now, not when Hannibal continues grinding their hips together, and the sweet friction is clouding Will's rational judgement. It's been a while, a long while, since anyone's given Will head, and he wouldn't let an opportunity for such wonderful treatment pass by, even if it presented itself in the form of a serial killer with people-eating tendencies.

"Let me suggest something better," Hannibal replies, shattering Will's blissful musings regarding finally getting his cock sucked.

Will whines low in his throat and watches as Hannibal sits back on his heels, his arm stretching out behind him to fetch something out of an antique drawer next to the chaise. His mind immediately comes up with several options of what it might be, but his train of thought is derailed by Hannibal once again. In the most euphoric way this time, as Will feels a wide hand curl around his shaft.

He exhales shakily and his eyelids fall shut, and Hannibal uses the opportunity to surge forward and brush his lips against Will's neck. Will reflexively tenses up at the contact, wiser this time around, and denies Hannibal access by pressing his chin to his chest.

Hannibal only smirks at that.

"Relax, Will," he purrs, resorting to kiss along Will's clavicle and down his sternum.

“Bite me again and I’ll slit your throat,” Will snarls in response.

His threat has substance to it. Will covertly glances at his pants on the floor, where a small switchblade is stashed into one of the pockets, yet undiscovered by Hannibal.

“Didn’t you like it?” Hannibal asks casually, paying no mind to Will’s violent threats.

Will eyes him coolly and shakes his head. It’s not that he doesn’t like it, per se. There’s just something deeply counter-intuitive in exposing his neck, with all its vital arteries and airways, to a vicious killer. Besides, the spot where Hannibal’s mouth left its mark *hurts*. The asshole bit him hard enough to draw blood, and if on top of that it leaves a scar, then fuck the switchblade — Will is going to strangle him with his bare hands.

“Shame,” Hannibal muses, undisturbed by Will’s malicious stare, “We’ll change that.”

His hand, still wrapped around Will’s cock, starts moving at a languid and teasing pace.

“Fuck...” Will mumbles, throwing his head back in a sudden rush of delight.

Immediately, he realises his mistake, as he feels Hannibal’s mouth find its way back to his neck. No biting this time, just slow open-mouthed kisses, all the while continuing to stroke Will with his hand.

Will sighs and relaxes, letting his hands roam the man’s body. He traces the shape of Hannibal’s back muscles with his fingers, making a point to dig his nails in and drag them across, marking the man in his own way. Hannibal moans at the sensation, his hips bucking against Will’s thigh. The man is most obviously a sadist, but the masochistic streak is a somewhat unexpected discovery, one that Will can use to his advantage in the future, if necessary.

He decides to speed up matters, sliding his palms to Hannibal’s ass and squeezing impatiently. Surely Hannibal had in mind something more than just a naked makeout session and handjobs. Will figures that since he’s not getting head, it must mean Hannibal will soon be settling between Will’s legs and throwing them over his shoulders. It’s been a while since Will had anything inside him, so he hopes that Hannibal is going to be gentler than his teeth had been.

Predictably, both Hannibal’s hands disappear between their crotches, and Will hears the all-too-familiar sounds of a rubber packet and a lube cap opening. What he fails to predict, though, is to find his own cock being the one that’s covered and slicked up.

Oh.

Hannibal the quirky cannibal wants Will to top him? After multiple attempts at establishing dominance, such as making Will surrender his gun, taunting him by psychoanalysing his insecurities, and manhandling him onto the harpsichord, the man wants to be the one to take Will’s cock, and not the opposite? Will almost laughs in disbelief, but he certainly isn’t against the idea. Quite the contrary in fact, judging by how his erection twitches enthusiastically at the prospect.

Hannibal coats his fingers in lube, in his usual graceful manner, but just as he is about to reach between his legs, Will swats his hand away with a disapproving grunt. He may be a prick, but he won't forego bedroom etiquette. Will slicks up his own fingers, and aligns them against Hannibal's opening. He presses in two, straight away, because yes, he *is* a prick. If Hannibal is as bold as he acts, he can take it.

And he takes it, evidently with pleasure, as Will can hear a moan drop from his lips and his hips thrust down to meet Will's fingers. Will chuckles at such an eager response. Hannibal hums from where he's busy mouthing at Will's collarbones. He keeps his teeth away, instead licking, sucking and kissing the skin and leaving behind a trail of red and purple imprints as Will works him open.

It doesn't take long, and soon he retracts his three fingers and attempts to sit up. Will figures that a change of positions is necessary if they're going to do this, and tries to shift, only to immediately be pushed back down by Hannibal's firm hands against his chest.

"Don't move," he instructs, and Will gives him a puzzled look, settling into his original position on his back.

Hannibal adjusts his legs momentarily, and then effortlessly eases himself down on Will's cock, using his hands on Will's chest to balance himself. Will gets laid often enough that he isn't new to the sensation, but even then, it feels maddeningly tight and intoxicating, somewhere between *sofuckinggood* and *ah-fucking-mazing*, and he has to bite his tongue to stop a litany of curses from spilling out from between his lips. The friction sends waves of bliss through his entire body, and his fingers clench, desperate to grasp something. Instinctively, Will's hands find Hannibal's hips and dig into them with an iron grip.

Hannibal looks down at Will's flushed face and smirks, taking him even deeper, and starts slowly rocking his hips up and down. Will automatically thrusts into him, chasing more of the sensation. That's when Hannibal's hands slide from his chest to seize his hip bones and press them down into the chaise with unyielding force.

"I said *don't move*," he repeats, his tone pure danger.

Does Hannibal use the same tone to talk to his victims before killing them, and if so, has it gotten any of them hard too?

Will huffs at the absurdity of the thought and stills his hips. Not that he has much choice in the matter now anyway — Hannibal's grip on them is that strong. Hannibal's plan for him has unravelled in its full glory, and honestly, Will isn't complaining in the slightest. Yes, he's being held down, and not being in control feels unsettling, but he's fully buried in Hannibal, who is riding him with a pace that feels just right. This could be worse. Much, much worse. Will could be dead, as one would expect to be after walking into a serial killer's house.

Instead, he's getting the last ounces of coherent thought fucked out by said killer.

No, this isn't bad. Not at all.

Quite the opposite, actually. As Will inches closer to his peak, his self-restraint plummets rapidly, and he finds himself fighting for more contact, deeper thrusts, further gratification. His hips are still trapped under Hannibal's unrelenting hold, so he clenches his fingers around Hannibal's pelvic bones and slams the man's entire body down harder onto his cock in a surge of selfish, animalistic need.

Hannibal retaliates, of course, by grabbing Will's wrists and pinning them down on either side of Will's head. A punishment for disobeying orders. Will doesn't mind, though, because he's getting exactly what he needs; Hannibal's thrusts quicken and the new rhythm is harder and faster, ascending Will higher and higher into ecstasy. From his position on the chaise, he can just see the head of Hannibal's cock, glistening with precum, begging to be touched, it *has to be touched*.

Will smirks, wide and conceited.

"I could be doing so much with my hand right now," he drawls, locking eyes with Hannibal, "but you seem to want to deny yourself the pleasure."

Hannibal groans, deep and guttural, admitting that Will has a point. He releases Will's hands and one immediately starts stroking Hannibal in time with his thrusts. The other hooks around the back of Hannibal's neck and pulls his upper body down to lie on top of Will, burying the man's face into his shoulder. Eyes are distracting; it's easier for Will to stare at the ceiling instead of having to look at Hannibal's face, especially now when he's driven to reach the culmination of his arousal as fast as possible.

Will scratches Hannibal's back again, the deep press of nails extending from the base of his skull to his lower back, and Hannibal's entire body contracts in response. He must be close too, Will guesses. It doesn't take many more up-and-down movements of Will's tight fist before Hannibal's breath catches and his release coats Will's stomach. He shudders and spasms in the process, which is the exact kind of stimulation that sends Will over the edge too. It feels like every muscle in his body coils tight like a spring, causing his legs to bend at the knees, his eyes clench shut, and his hips snap up in earnest as he rides out his orgasm.

The force of both their climaxes shakes through Hannibal's arms, one on each side of Will's head, making them give out, but he catches himself on his elbows, ending up chest to chest with Will, their faces centimetres from each other, panting rapidly in a synchrony of ragged inhales and exhales.

"Fuck," Will gasps. The pinnacle of eloquence.

Hannibal lets out a satisfied grunt and lowers himself down to lie on top of Will, his breath tickling the side of Will's neck. The weight of his body slumped over Will's is heavy, but he doesn't blame the man; his thighs must hurt after bouncing on Will's cock like that. Besides, staying like this, skin against skin, feels warm and comforting. Almost way too comforting for Will's liking.

There's something highly fucked-up about partaking in a naked embrace with a ruthless murderer. There has to be. Will can excuse the sex because it's done purely for the purposes of self-gratification. But anything more than that feels wrong, not something that Will

deserves, not something men like him are allowed to have. This is a one-night stand, not a cuddling session, and Will needs to set the boundaries as such, before his blissed-out brain convinces him that it's okay to just enjoy the warmth of Hannibal's body around his, without guilt.

Will gives a quiet groan, arching his back up in a wordless request for Hannibal to get off him. Hannibal sits back on his knees right away; so gentlemanly and attentive to his guest's needs, as always. He produces tissues as if out of thin air and begins cleaning their stomachs. Will is astounded; they ended up fucking in the lounge room, for god's sake, yet Hannibal was somehow still prepared, from lubricant and protection to cleaning up. Maybe it's his calculating nature that has allowed him to kill and eat people without being caught all this time.

Will makes a mental note never to underestimate Hannibal Lecter, not when it comes to his dangerousness as a killer, but also not regarding his skills as a bed partner.

"How did you like the dessert course?" Hannibal asks in a conversational tone, standing up and starting to redress.

"Quite exquisite," Will responds without missing a beat, just as casually, as if they're really discussing food. The next words slip out of his mouth before he has time to stop it: "We should have dinner together again some time."

Hannibal's mouth curves upwards into a sated, pleased smile.

"Oh, we will."

Chapter End Notes

Was the dinner what you expected? What about the dessert? ;)

I promise that there's an actual plot to this fic hahaha. It'll all start happening from next chapter onwards.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“What’s the request?”

“I simply wish to watch you work,” Hannibal responds.

Will’s response is instant, like an overly pronounced knee-jerk reaction.

“No.”

Chapter Notes

In this chapter we get to learn a little more about who Z is. And a couple of other characters from the show make a cameo!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

To say that Will is stressed would be an understatement.

Why couldn’t he have picked a less exhausting and dangerous way to make a living? Like fixing boat motors, for example. If he did a bad job on a motor, the customer would probably contact him, yell at him, and demand their money back. Whereas the clients at Will’s current occupation are different. If he failed an assignment, they wouldn’t yell, wouldn’t make a fuss. They’d simply send their right-hand man to put a bullet in Will’s skull.

Will doesn’t exactly want to die, which is precisely why he’s determined to complete the assignment he’s been hired to do, by a new client this time. When he took on the job, persuaded by the above-average paycheck, he didn’t think his target would be so damn difficult to eliminate. He should’ve known that the more money he’s offered, the more challenging the mission would be.

The lady is an absolute pain in the ass. Mrs. Andromeda Nolan is cautious and always well protected; Will guesses that she probably knows what’s coming for her. She’s an executive at a large company and has a reputation for being a ruthless leader, which means she has more than likely stepped on a lot of people’s toes to attain that power.

Will has been shadowing the woman non-stop for three weeks now, and in that time, not once has she been alone at a quiet location that would be ideal for Will to do his job. Not only that, but even when he stalks her in crowded places in the middle of the day, he can never get a

clear shot. Whenever Mrs. Nolan travels anywhere, she goes straight from the building into the car, making sure to always stay protected by layers of walls or glass. She's got to know that she's on someone's hit list.

And that someone is almost at his wits' end, wondering how the fuck he's going to pull off a mission like this.

Will has started considering the possibility of having to shoot through a window. It isn't an optimal strategy but it looks like he doesn't have a choice. The shattering glass could affect the trajectory of the bullet, possibly resulting in a non-fatal wound, or missing the target's head completely. Will can't take that risk.

But he's running out of other options, and more importantly, he's running out of time.

And then, as if Will isn't already about to tear his own hair out, he gets a text from Z, telling him that his regular employer has another assignment for him.

Will knows better than to refuse the job, especially from the man who he has already established a pleasant working relationship with. Ideally, he wouldn't try to juggle two contract kill missions simultaneously, but he can manage. He *has* to.

So, at 11am on a Wednesday morning, Will sits down on a bench at the predetermined location. Z is already sitting at the other end, casually smoking a cigarette. Will greets him with a stiff nod, and the man does the same. Z's eyes quickly scan their surroundings for nosy passersby, and once he's satisfied that no one is watching them, he pulls a book out of his bag, sliding it across the bench to Will.

Will takes it and huffs at the title, *Alice in Wonderland*. With his leather jacket, dark coarse-looking facial hair extending down to his neck, and the overall gruff appearance, Z doesn't look like someone that would carry a children's book around. Will chuckles internally and flips through the pages, eventually finding the information about his next target stuck to one of them.

His eyes dart over the paragraphs of text, picking out the most important details that allow him to gauge the nature of the job; name of the target, occupation, location, and photograph. It looks like nothing out of the ordinary.

Will turns to Z and gives him another small nod; assignment accepted.

"My advance?" Will says, holding his hand out expectantly.

Z's eyes swiftly check their surroundings once more before he fetches a plain envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket, handing it to Will.

Will counts the notes placed inside it. He always demands 50% of his paycheck upfront, to seal the deal. He isn't naive enough to commit to *killing someone* without clear proof that his client can and will reimburse him for his efforts.

Satisfied with the amount of money in the envelope, Will sets out to get on his feet and leave, but stops when Z speaks.

“One more thing,” the man drawls in his typical dispassionate voice, blowing out a thick cloud of cigarette smoke.

Will raises an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

“The boss wants it done by the 23rd.”

“Of April?” Will asks. There’s nothing worse than failing an assignment of this nature simply because you didn’t clarify the month of the deadline.

“Duh,” Z replies with a shit-eating smirk, looking at Will like he’s a degenerate.

Will wants to punch the man for his condescending remark, but that wouldn’t be wise. He gives Z a scolding look and focuses on performing the mental math instead. Today is the 10th of April, which means he has just under two weeks to complete the proposed task. Will’s usual turnaround is one month, and he’s previously made that very clear to his employer. The corporate nightmare under the name Mrs. Nolan is already driving him insane, and he has less than a week left to kill her. There is absolutely no way he can accomplish both these assignments within the proposed time frame.

But there is also absolutely no way he can refuse the job without losing the valuable relationship with this employer either.

“No deal. If he wants to cut my work time in half, he’s gotta pay me double,” Will states, his stone-cold expression unwavering.

Z flicks the ashes off his cigarette, some of them landing on Will’s shoes. “150 percent of your usual rate, no more.”

“I said double,” Will insists, his mouth twisting into a tight line.

“The boss has set his price. Take it or leave it,” Z counters with a conceited shrug.

Will isn’t having any of it. All the built-up stress and tension from his so far unsuccessful attempts to assassinate the CEO lady erupts in a wave of poorly restrained anger at the man’s provocation.

“How about you take your smug ass back to your boss and tell him my services are non-fucking-negotiable? It’s either double rate, or he can go do this shit himself.”

Will is up on his feet now, leaning over Z so they’re face to face, his eyes shooting daggers at the man. Z looks infuriatingly unbothered by all of it.

“150% is final,” he says and blows a cloud of smoke right into Will’s eyes.

“Did I fucking stutter, *Brian*?” Will retaliates, resorting to using the one last weapon he knows is going to wipe that cocky look off the man’s face.

As expected, Z's eyes widen at the mention of his real name. Will smiles triumphantly. It always pays off to do his research, not only on his targets but also on his employers and their underlings.

"Fine, I'll ask him," the man grits out.

He pulls out his phone and taps a few messages on it. Will waits impatiently, still glaring at Z and bouncing his leg in a bundle of pent-up energy.

"Alright, double rate," Z concedes finally, reluctance and disagreement with his boss's decision evident in his voice.

Will gives him a satisfied smirk. "Tell him it's always a pleasure to do business with him."

Before Z responds, Will turns on his heels and walks off without looking back.

Hannibal doesn't bother wearing underwear anymore.

They both know what happens every time they see each other. Will arrives at Hannibal's house in time for dinner, they eat a decadent meal, have mind-blowing sex, and Will goes home. It's very efficient and very simple. So, the lack of undergarments just means less layers for Will to peel off the man's irresistible body.

It's an all-round wonderful arrangement. Will really can't complain. What they have is the pure definition of a "no strings attached" relationship; casual fucking without the emotional obligations. All the benefits and zero downsides. The best of both worlds. Or, that's what it should feel like.

Sometimes, after they've redressed, Hannibal offers him a drink by the fireplace, and they talk about things. Nothing too personal, just the kind of good-natured chat one would have with a friendly colleague. Can he describe Hannibal as a colleague? Will isn't sure.

What he is sure of is that he likes what he has with Hannibal. More than he wants to admit. Especially the part where they talk. Getting laid regularly is always great, but there's something special in those moments where they lounge on soft armchairs with drinks in hand and have deep conversations about existentialism, the fallibility of human morality, and the like. Strangely, Will finds Hannibal easier to talk to than anyone he's ever met. It must be because he is a psychiatrist; clearly a very good one, since he has his own clinic. Will feels like he could easily spend hours just talking to Hannibal, through the night and into the sunrise. But Hannibal never offers for him to stay the night. And Will never asks.

He tries not to let it bother him. Staying the night implies commitment and expectations, and he understands why Hannibal wouldn't want that. Having a real and proper relationship isn't really possible for people like them, whose hands are constantly stained with others' blood.

Will hates himself for falling prey to this thought, wanting to exorcise it out of his body as if it's a sinister demon, and he'll be damned for starting to think about it in the first place, but god, *is it so wrong to just want one simple kiss?*

They fuck. A lot. With animalistic fervour and unrestrained passion. In different positions and different rooms. But not once has Hannibal kissed him on the lips. And it's not because the man is shy with his mouth. He has absolutely no trouble marking Will up with his teeth, to the point where Will's neck, chest and shoulders have turned into a permanent exhibition of bruises and bite marks in various stages of bloom. They've engaged in so many unholy acts together, but it seems that letting their lips meet in a simple and innocent kiss is the real forbidden sin; an unwritten rule they can't breach.

It's just kissing, not a fucking marriage proposal. Why is it such a big deal? Will tells himself that it *isn't*. He should be grateful for the arrangement he has with Hannibal and not hope for more. And Will most definitely should never bring it up with Hannibal, in fear of ruining everything. Besides, judging by the way Hannibal is acting, he doesn't want an actual relationship. If the sex is good, who cares about the kissing? So, Will stays quiet.

"You seem on edge today." Hannibal's inquisitive voice pulls Will out of his musings.

He's already decided he's not going to talk to Hannibal about anything relating to their relationship, or the formal lack thereof. And he can't talk about his work being stressful either. No way. It's too dangerous, too risky for Will to even hint that he's currently working on an assignment. What if Hannibal knows either of his targets and puts two and two together? No, Will has to be careful.

"My dog's sick. Winston. Been to the vet 3 times in the past couple of weeks," he lies smoothly.

Hannibal tilts his head to the side and regards Will with an unreadable expression on his face. Will doesn't particularly care if the man can tell his excuse is fake. Keeping his work classified isn't a personal offense, but rather professional courtesy.

"I wish dear Winston an expeditious recovery," Hannibal says, always so tactful. "I have a proposition for you, but seeing that you already have your hands full with your dog, it can wait."

Will quirks an eyebrow and takes a sip of his cognac, the top-quality liquor creating a warm and soothing sensation in his throat and stomach. "Now you've got me curious."

A proposition from a serial killer usually ends badly. But if said serial killer is someone you sleep with regularly, maybe it entails something good. Will decides to find out.

Hannibal gives him a pleased smile and refills his glass. "I'd like to know how one would go about requesting your services."

"My *services*?" Will repeats, turning to face the other man head-on. This is not what he expected. "I'm fairly sure you're perfectly able to handle matters of that nature yourself."

Will remembers watching Hannibal slit that man's throat at the dock. His hand carrying the blade moved with the elegance of a dancer but with the precision of a surgeon, making it evident that Hannibal is an experienced killer.

"I am," Hannibal agrees calmly, "but I have my reasons for wanting to employ you, specifically."

"I've heard it isn't wise to mix business with pleasure," Will deflects with a light chuckle.

This isn't happening. No way. He is already up to his neck in difficult assignments and looming deadlines.

"Quite the contrary," Hannibal counters with his typical polite smile, "With the highly specialised occupation that you have, it presents a rather unique opportunity."

Will sighs and rubs the back of his neck, taking a moment to compose his thoughts before speaking.

"I appreciate that you want to hire me, but I'm really booked up at the moment."

"As I said before, this isn't urgent," Hannibal continues, infuriatingly courteous and persistent. "It can wait until your schedule is less occupied by matters such as... *your dog*."

Will resists the urge to roll his eyes — the dog excuse was bound to fail eventually. What's clear is that Hannibal isn't backing down on his request, and Will feels an unpleasant feeling settle into the bottom of his stomach.

Hannibal reaches into the drawer next to his seat and takes out a dark, crimson-coloured leather file. It reminds Will of the menus at luxurious restaurants. He realises with a tinge of shock and amusement that to Hannibal, that's exactly what the contents of the file are — food.

Will sighs again and opens the file.

Mason Verger, the head of the Verger meat packing business, one of the biggest meat suppliers in the country. Will lets himself briefly wonder why Hannibal is targeting this man. Does Hannibal deem Mr. Verger's taste in meat offensive since he prefers pork products over human?

Will really, really doesn't want to get involved in anyone's meat debates. He focuses on examining the rest of the contents of the file, noting down the names and faces of Mr. Verger's main henchmen, including his right-hand man, Cordell. Once he has finished, he closes the folder and meets Hannibal's eyes.

"Am I correct in assuming you accept my proposition?" Hannibal queries.

The question is pointless, really. There is no way Will can refuse the task now. He's seen the file, which makes him automatically complicit.

“As long as you’re happy with it taking longer than my usual time frame,” he says with a long, resigned exhale.

“The time frame isn’t my concern at all.”

Will raises an eyebrow. “What is, then?”

“I would like to make a special request,” Hannibal reveals, finishing his drink. “It’s nothing grotesque or unreasonable, don’t worry. And the additional reimbursement for catering to my personal wishes will be sizable, of course.”

Will instinctively wants to object and say that he doesn’t do special requests. But that would be a lie, he and Hannibal both know it. He delivers samples of flesh and other body parts to his regular employer, which is something Hannibal is very well aware of, since he provided the latest one out of his own collection of frozen human organs.

“What’s the request?” Will asks warily. The sooner this whole ordeal is over, the better.

“I simply wish to watch you work.”

Will’s response is instant, like an overly pronounced knee-jerk reaction.

“No.”

He forces himself to meet Hannibal’s eyes. The man’s stare is hot and piercing, and it tastes like challenge.

“I work alone,” Will adds, overwhelmed by the sudden urge to explain himself.

He hopes with every fibre of his body that this is the end of the conversation. But of course, Hannibal is a pain in the ass that doesn’t give up so easily.

“Please indulge me, Will.” The man’s voice is sweet and coaxing, much like the top-shelf liquor he served Will. “You can set the price to what you deem appropriate.”

Will lets out an incredulous huff. This isn’t about the money.

“What would you get out of watching me kill someone?” he questions cautiously. With every passing second he grows more and more certain he doesn’t actually want to hear the answer to that.

“The delight of witnessing you in your most fierce glory,” Hannibal replies in his characteristic unperturbed fashion. “I would find this experience rather... invigorating.”

If Will wasn’t cursed with the ability to read people like an open book, and if he hadn’t already catalogued all of Hannibal’s microexpressions and how they convey carnal desire for Will’s body, he would’ve missed it. He would’ve been oblivious to the subtle widening of Hannibal’s pupils and the way his tongue darts over his teeth, anticipating the taste of sweat and lust.

“Is this what you meant by the unique opportunity to mix business with pleasure?” Will asks in disbelief. He has to be dreaming.

Hannibal’s reply is maddeningly casual, almost coy. “Perhaps.”

The unpleasant feeling in Will’s stomach now spreads into the rest of his body, filling his cells with bubbling nausea.

“You’re— You want to watch me kill because it *turns you on*?”

“I did not say that,” Hannibal counters as his eyebrows rise in amusement.

Will knows it’s an act, it has to be. A sickening and infuriating act.

“But you’re not fucking denying it either,” he spits out.

Hannibal keeps looking at him, a curious smile ghosting over his features. Will glares back, chest heaving in an inexplicable wave of... Disgust? Anger? Shock? He isn’t sure what exactly, but the feeling is revolting, twisting his guts inside out.

“Are you rejecting my proposition?” Hannibal queries at last.

“Damn right I am!” Will explodes, his raised voice echoing off the high ceiling in Hannibal’s study. “I’m not a fucking rent boy you can pay to cater to your sick fetishes.”

“Will, I’m afraid you have misinterpreted —”

“*Don’t*,” Will interrupts with so much venom in his tone that Hannibal falls silent.

The growing nausea inside him turns into something that feels much, much worse. It feels like the kind of devastating hurt one experiences when something seemingly perfect turns out to be a stab in the back. Because everything in Will’s life that seems too good to be true always is.

“You used me,” he says, and somehow his voice doesn’t crack, even though everything inside him already feels broken.

Hannibal opens his mouth to protest, but Will doesn’t give him a chance, grabbing his coat and storming out.

“Don’t fucking call me ever again, asshole.”

For the next few days, Will doesn’t think about the sour events that happened at Hannibal’s house. If he let his thoughts wander to that godforsaken evening, he’d find himself back in

Hannibal's living room, his hands wrapped around the man's throat.

No, Will has more urgent matters to address, more urgent people to kill. It's almost midnight when he gets back home after another unfruitful attempt to assassinate Mrs. Nolan as she ventured out to dine at some extravagant restaurant. He has resigned to having to shoot through the glass, hoping to finally pull the trigger tonight. But again, Mrs. Impossible-To-Kill positioned herself far from all the windows, and Will didn't get a chance to point his red dot of doom at her head.

He sighs and climbs out of his car, determined to try again tomorrow. He has only three days left before the date he promised to have the job done by, and he can hear the clock ticking, a steady and menacing rhythm inside his head. As such, Will really doesn't have the time to think about Hannibal and how everything they had is now ruined. It was just sex. No feelings attached. Nothing to feel mooney about.

Will locks his car, anticipating the soothing burn of the whiskey he's going to pour himself as soon as he steps into his house, when he catches a flash of movement in the side mirror of the vehicle.

He spins on his heels and comes face to face with a tall and bulky figure, covered in black clothing from head to toe, except for the strip of skin where his eyes are. Will's breath catches in his throat as the man's fist collides with his nose, causing his head to snap back and smash into the hard metal of the car exterior.

Will instinctively ducks down, away from the next punch. It lands onto the car window, shattering it with a deafening clink. The stranger loses his balance as his arm continues its trajectory past the glass and hits the glovebox, making the CD cases inside it spill out.

Will doesn't look back and bolts towards the safety of his house. However, his escape is cut short by the sound of a gun cocking, and instead of continuing to run for the front door, he plunges himself sharply to the left, around the side of the car, away from the imminent bullet.

The gunshot makes the air vibrate, and Will's racing heart follows in its wake, beating just as loud. He has no time to see if the bullet hit him; the only thing that matters is his own handgun that he's fumbling to grasp, like his life depends on it.

Because it does.

Will doesn't know who this mysterious attacker is or why he was lying in wait at Will's property. He only knows one thing: the man is here to kill him. But Will sure as hell isn't going down without a fight.

There is a brief second of silence, as they crouch on the opposite sides of the car, each waiting for the other to strike first. Will wipes his bloodied face with his sleeve and pushes his glasses, now stained with red splashes, onto his forehead as he assesses the situation. His close combat skills aren't exactly world-class, so a head-on attack isn't his best bet. The odds are racked heavily in the assailant's favour, being larger and definitely physically stronger

than Will, so it's only a matter of time before he starts to advance again. Will has to improvise.

The remote key to his car is still in his hand, the one that isn't now firmly clutching his gun. He jams the button, activating the security alarm of the vehicle. The cacophony of flashing lights and blaring sounds momentarily stuns the assailant, while Will drops down, face to the ground, so he can see the other side through the gap between the car and the road.

He may not be the most capable fighter, but he can pinpoint the moment when he has a clear shot. And when he has a clear shot, he never fails to hit the target. Will is dizzy from the blood flooding his mouth but he stretches out his arm and pulls the trigger.

The bullet lodges itself into the attacker's ankle, possibly — *hopefully* — rupturing his Achilles tendon. The man growls and collapses onto the ground. Will shoots him again, this time in the ribcage. As he slowly walks around the car, he sees the steadily-growing puddle of blood before laying eyes on the dark figure he managed to incapacitate.

The assailant grunts in agony and coughs up a splatter of blood. His hand that's holding a gun rises in his last attempt at self-defense, but Will is faster. It's a clean shot to the head this time. The back of the man's skull hits the ground almost as soon as Will fires the bullet.

Will stares.

He stares until his senses come back to him. Until his ears stop ringing and he stops hyperventilating. Until the man is no longer breathing and Will is standing there, still clueless as to who ordered a hit on him and why, meaning he's got someone's blood on his hands and zero answers.

He's killed before of course, many times, but never like this. Never in a mess of sweat and blood, looking into his victim's eyes while pulling the trigger. Never while fighting for his own life.

He takes a moment, or two, or *ten*, to push the panic away and force his brain to think rationally. Thankfully, the closest neighbours are far enough away where the noise wouldn't have alerted them. Will pinches his eyes shut and rubs his temples. He has a dead body to deal with now.

Yes, he's a killer by profession, but his job doesn't involve disposing of the corpses he leaves behind. All he does is pull the trigger; the consequences of his deadly actions aren't his concern. Although every cell of Will's body fights against it, he wills himself to focus on the task at hand and takes a few shaky steps towards the man's cooling body. Will doesn't need to see his whole face to recognise him. A little strip of skin illuminated by the moonlight is enough.

Cordell. The man Will saw in Mason Verger's file.

His head starts spinning. Why does Verger want him dead? He's never even met the man. As much as it pains Will to acknowledge it, the answer is more than obvious. There is only one missing link in the chain that connects Will to the king of the meat packing dynasty.

If he stubbornly keeps his eyes screwed shut long enough, all of this should eventually vanish like a gruesome nightmare in the wake of sunrise. *It has to.*

When Will hears poised and leisurely footsteps approach him, he doesn't bother looking up. He doesn't need to use his eyes to know exactly who is in front of him.

"Good evening, Will," the familiar voice invades his ears, "You were just as glorious as I imagined."

Will opens his eyes, and sure enough, there he is. The devil himself, materialising out of the shadows, rising from the pits of hell. He's wearing a long black coat, its shiny metal buttons glimmering in the moonlight just as brightly as the silver strands in his hair. It's probably due to the head injury he suffered due to Cordell's punch, but Will could swear that Hannibal's eyes are glowing red and there are devil horns spurting out of his head.

"You... You sent him after me," Will accuses bitterly, "because you wanted to watch me..."

He's exhausted and his head is throbbing, so the words come out way weaker and less furious than he hoped for. Will adds more bite to them by spitting on the ground in front of Hannibal. The lump of saliva mixed with blood from his busted nose lands dangerously close to the man's polished shoes. He should've spat harder.

"Was that really so surprising, after you declined my request?" Hannibal queries after a brief glance to gauge the fate of his boots. His tone is pure childlike innocence, as if he did nothing wrong.

As if he didn't just deliberately try to get Will killed for his own amusement.

Will hand snaps up to point the barrel of his gun to Hannibal's head. His whole arm shakes, and he'd most likely miss if he fired, but he doesn't care. All he wants is for Hannibal and this entire mess to disappear and pretend it never happened. He's angry, appalled, and on the brink of collapsing.

"Get. The fuck. Off. My property!" Will growls.

Hannibal doesn't flinch under the threat. He just smiles. A small, but self-satisfied smirk.

"As you wish. I won't intrude on your evening any longer than necessary."

Of course the bastard is smiling. He got exactly what he wanted — to watch Will take a life. And although Will did everything to refuse participating in this wicked game, he didn't get a choice in the matter in the end. His trigger finger twitches, itching to squeeze it so goddamn badly, as he steps forward and stops right in front of Hannibal. Close enough to touch.

"Now," he commands, "Or I'll empty this gun right into your fucking face."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, and the corner of his mouth quirks in distaste, as if he disapproves of Will's actions, knowing he won't pull the trigger.

And as much as Will wants to, he knows that he won't, too. Shooting people is his job, the everyday grind, simply business. But this, this is *personal*. Will wants to feel it; the satisfaction deep in his bones, fresh blood on his bare hands, an impact far more intimate than the recoil of his gun.

He draws his fist back and hits Hannibal right in the face. It lands awfully near the cavity of the skull where his left eye is situated, accompanied by a grisly sound.

Will immediately expects retaliation, either in the form of a punch, or having his throat cut the same way he saw Hannibal kill Will's target all those weeks ago. But Hannibal doesn't fight back. He simply grunts in pain and brings his hand to his face to check for fractures.

Will watches, frozen in place, until the man finally meets his eyes and speaks.

"Goodnight, Will," is all he says. His voice is surprisingly calm and composed, but Will can see the pronounced throb of the injured muscle underneath his eyebrow.

Will turns and briskly heads towards his house, before Hannibal imminently changes his mind and murders him in cold blood there and then. As he approaches his front door, he fully expects to be tackled to the ground, but nothing comes. He shoots a quick glance in Hannibal's direction before unlocking the door and disappearing safely inside. The man is still standing in the spot where Will left him, appearing contemplative and almost regretful. That is, if the abominable creature under the name Hannibal Lecter was capable of regret.

Whiskey has never sounded more enticing than it does now. Will doesn't even bother grabbing a glass, setting his sights on downing all of it straight from the bottle instead. The situation warrants it. He gets about halfway through the bottle before his head feels sufficiently clear. The alcohol washes down the blood from his tongue and calms the tremor in his hands. Hannibal is probably gone by now. Surely he has enough common sense left in his stupid aristocrat brain to get his sorry ass off Will's property before Will decides to lay more punches in his liquor-fuelled rage.

And then there's the second problem; there's still a body lying in his front yard.

Will takes the whiskey with him as he steps back outside, ready to face the dead and unmoving eyes of the man he killed. He blinks. Once, twice. Rubs his eyes with his hand. Looks again, dumbfounded.

Cordell's lifeless form is nowhere to be seen.

Will's last shot was fatal, he knows it for a fact. There is no way Cordell could've survived and escaped. That leaves only one possibility. Hannibal the opportunistic cannibal must have taken the body to replenish his human meat freezer with.

Will can't believe his eyes; Hannibal did something helpful, for once.

He stumbles back inside and plants himself face first into bed. No thoughts, no feelings, just sleep, he tells himself. The body is gone, which means Will can pretend everything that happened tonight was just one elaborate and torturous nightmare.

Chapter End Notes

This was one of the most action packed chapters i've written in a long time. Any ideas for what's going to happen next?

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Both subjects of Will's new plan are fans of classical music, and therefore frequent the same performances. All Will needs to do is set Hannibal and Mrs. Nolan on a collision course, and then simply sit back and watch the catastrophe unfold.

Chapter Notes

In short, Will orchestrates his revenge on Hannibal, and tensions rise.

For anyone that likes visuals, [this](#) is the suit I envision Hannibal wearing to the opera. And [this](#) is Will's outfit.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will can't sleep. He tosses and turns past 2 a.m. Followed by 3 a.m, then 4 a.m. Sleep comes eventually, coaxing his brain deep into the dream land. He lets it, because reality is shaping up to be far worse than any nightmare he could possibly experience.

Cordell's body is back in Will's front yard, ominously thrashing around like a maimed ghost. Will ignores it in favour of looking Hannibal in the eye and menacingly invading his personal space by stepping closer and closer. There is amusement and elation in Hannibal's gaze, which is a stark opposite to the hostile intent in Will's.

Will snarls, presses the barrel of the gun right between Hannibal's eyes, and fires. The man's entire form convulses, and Will feels the profound impact in his own body too. More specifically, and yet inexplicably, in his groin.

Will looks down, confused, just to find — to his horror or delight, he isn't quite sure — his cock buried deep between Hannibal's ass cheeks, right down to the base. The man's thighs straddling Will's crotch tremble violently as rivers of red blood flow down his torso, coating them both. Will draws in a shocked breath as his vision starts spinning.

When he exhales he realises he's safely in his own bed. He's still clutching at what he thought was Hannibal's body, but it turns out to be his pillow. Once his rapid breathing has evened out, he turns to his side, seeking a more comfortable position, and tries to sleep again. With no success, as to be expected; his body is too awake. Too *aroused*.

"Fuck," Will mumbles as he slides a hand into his boxers.

No other utterance would be more perfect for the situation he's in. Fuck Hannibal. Fuck his twisted games of kill or be killed. Fuck whatever demon possessed Will's body and decided his boner won't subside unless he gets off to the images of blood, sex and violence that his brain is feeding him.

Fuck Hannibal.

Clearly, some part of Will, the one responsible for his obscure wet dream, wishes he was doing exactly that.

Will wants to scream. He hates Hannibal, despises the man with all his heart. Hannibal used him for sex, and that's not even the worst part. He used Will to fulfil his *murder fantasies*. Will feels hollowed out and lied to, vindictive rage slowly filling the empty space Hannibal's betrayal left in him.

Will wants him dead. Just like Cordell, sprawled on the cold ground, unseeing eyes staring into nothingness.

His hand goes numb from gripping his cock for so long, the release still frustratingly far out of reach. No wonder, since he's been thinking about murder. Unlike certain individuals, violence and death aren't at the top of the list of things Will finds arousing. He flops onto his stomach with a groan, hoping that grinding his hips against the mattress will give him the necessary friction to bring himself over the edge.

Reluctantly, his mind goes back to thinking about Hannibal, about all those times they slept together. Will remembers himself, laid on his back on top of that harpsichord in Hannibal's lounge room, getting the last ounces of his coherent thoughts pounded out by the man. In this mind space, surrounded by the vivid memories of their heated acts, it doesn't take Will long to finish. His release stains the sheets, but he simply rolls over to the clean side. Thank fuck for having a double bed.

Will tries not to think about the fact that he just jerked off to the man that sent someone to kill him for pure entertainment. Hate-sex is totally a thing, right? It's perfectly sensible to want to fuck the person that he also wants to kill.

Right ?

It's been several days, and Will is still furious. Or rather, hellbent on revenge. He considers ambushing Hannibal in his psychiatry clinic where he'd least expect it. He wants to surprise Hannibal, to shock him, and not in a nice way.

Instead, Hannibal manages to surprise Will.

A bouquet of crimson-red roses is waiting at Will's front porch when he gets home one afternoon. The delicate and fragrant flowers are accompanied by a card with oblique and ornate handwriting. Will's eyes dart across the pristine paper, catching glimpses of the phrases "my actions may have been impulsive" and "dinner on Monday at 7 o'clock?"

Will cuts up the roses and rips the letter into shreds. He shoves everything into an envelope without a return address and mails it back to Hannibal. This way, there is absolutely no chance of his response to the dinner invitation being misinterpreted.

He'll focus on getting properly back at Hannibal once he's dealt with his current job assignments. Specifically Mrs. Nolan, the corporate shark that has so far managed to evade Will's assassination attempts. As much as he is itching to get revenge on Hannibal for his twisted games as soon as possible, Will's targets must come first because his deadlines are approaching fast.

Unless he can take care of both his problems, concurrently. Two birds with one stone.

Hannibal sent Cordell after Will, most likely by hinting to Mason Verger that he is on Will's hit list. Now, Will is going to give Hannibal a taste of his own medicine. He's going to find a way to somehow pit Mrs. Nolan's henchmen against Hannibal, hoping that when Hannibal kills them, he takes down the woman herself in the process too. Either that, or Will can use the diversion to do the deed himself.

Such a scheme would serve Hannibal right.

Due to having stalked Mrs. Nolan for almost a month, Will already knows everything about the woman's daily schedule, hobbies, and interests. He knows the same things about Hannibal, too. So, finding an intersection point where their paths could cross isn't all that difficult.

The opera. Both subjects of Will's new plan are fans of classical music, and therefore frequent the same performances. All Will needs to do is set Hannibal and Mrs. Nolan on a collision course, and then simply sit back and watch the catastrophe unfold.

Mozart's pieces always pull the most prestigious crowd, and "*The Marriage of Figaro*" is no exception. In order to blend in with the aristocratic opera fans, Will had to buy a new suit jacket and an iron to smooth out the wrinkles in his best dress shirt. The jacket is totally a different shade of black than his suit pants, but it's not obvious enough to make him look out of place. Nobody's going to think he looks guilty, as long as he doesn't act that way.

The performance hall is equipped with metal detectors upon entry, as well as X-ray machines that everyone's belongings go through. There is absolutely no chance of sneaking in any kind

of firearm or blade. Will did his research, like he always does, so he made sure not to bring a weapon of that kind.

His bright yellow Epipen stands out amidst all the handbags, watches, keys, phones and wallets that feed into the X-ray machine, and elicits a curious glance from one of the guards.

“I’m allergic to dairy,” Will explains as he collects all his belongings at the other end of the machine.

Once done, he heads for the stairs leading to the highest section of seats, as printed on his ticket. He purchased it with cash and under a fake name of course, to avoid producing any evidence of him being here tonight. Will stations himself at the top of the magnificent marble staircase, where he can see all the opera guests mingling in the foyer before the performance starts. Although he doesn’t have his sniper rifle, something about the elevated position and being able to watch people from afar gives him a feeling of familiarity and comfort.

He spots Mrs. Nolan immediately at the bar, accompanied by her inconspicuous but still very intimidating bodyguard. Will wonders if the guy feels naked without a gun, just like he does. Not that the guard would need one, judging by the sheer mass of muscle on him. Fortunately, if all goes to plan, Will won’t have to even come face to face with the man.

Hannibal arrives a few moments later, and Will’s entire body tightens up with hatred, from core muscles to his fingertips. Hannibal looks dazzling in his purple patterned suit and navy-blue tie; the textbook definition of class and elegance. It’s a nice outfit, but it’s going to look even nicer once Will paints it red with blood.

He watches Hannibal briefly greet several acquaintances on his way to deposit his overcoat at the cloakroom. As he comes closer to where Will is lurking, Will can see no signs of damage that his fist caused to Hannibal’s face. He’s pretty certain that his punch had bruising force behind it, so the man must’ve had to use makeup to be able to conceal it so well. In contrast, Will’s own busted nose, courtesy of Cordell, is painfully obvious. The notion enrages Will further; some part of him wished Hannibal would wear his black eye openly and have to endure constant questions about its origins, just like Will has to.

Hopefully, before the end of the performance tonight, Hannibal will have many more bruises to grace his smug face, as well as the rest of his body.

Personally, Will doesn’t see the appeal in the opera. Had the circumstances been different, he would’ve gotten bored to death and most likely fallen asleep. But today, his plan is making him restless. As the first act goes on, he spends his time counting the rows and seats to pinpoint the exact location of Hannibal’s seat, and then recounting them again and again to make sure he doesn’t get it wrong.

It’s not too late to give up his plan and simply enjoy the night. Will could do that, but he would imminently fail his assignment regarding Mrs. Nolan, and have to suffer the consequences of disappointing the big boss. It would be interesting to see who gets to Will first: this boss or Mason Verger, who by now must know that Will was behind Cordell’s grisly fate. Will doesn’t want to die by either party’s hand, but if it’s inevitable, he should at

least try to take Hannibal down with him. It can be his dying wish. Besides, the man deserves it.

With this newfound determination, Will heads straight to the bar once intermission starts. Mrs. Nolan will be there soon without a doubt, to pump more liquor into her body. Will doesn't need to be a professional stalker-assassin to know the lady is a seasoned alcoholic.

He lingers a few metres away from the bar, tapping on his phone, pretending to be preoccupied by an incoming text message. Once the target with her hired muscle has come up to order a drink, Will casually saunters over to stand beside her. He asks the bartender for a whiskey on the rocks and lets his eyes meet Mrs. Nolan's, as if by accident.

"Wonderful performance so far, isn't it?" he says with a polite smile.

She smiles back, friendly and charming, but it doesn't quite reach her eyes. She has a cold heart, Will deduces immediately; a wolf in sheep's clothing. This, *exactly this*, is why he avoids coming into direct contact with his targets. Will sees too much, right through their eyes into their souls, all their thoughts and feelings on display like an open book. And god forbid he, a professional hitman, develops any sympathy or emotional attachment to his future victim. That would be a career suicide.

"Indeed. I never miss a performance of Mozart's," the lady replies, brushing a bleach-blond strand of hair away from her face.

Will is acutely aware of the burning stare of Mrs. Nolan's goon on his back, as the guy watches him intently from a few steps away. He draws in a subtle breath, then leans forward, as if to brush dust off his knee, while bringing his lips close to the woman's ear.

"Well, the man in seat G34 is here to make sure you won't get to see the ending of this one," he whispers.

He's timed it well. As soon as the words leave his mouth, the bartender brings his drink. In one fluid motion, Will picks up the glass and exits the bar, disappearing into the crowd.

The increasing blood alcohol concentration in his system is supposed to have a reciprocal effect on his anxiety. But it doesn't. Although Will hasn't done anything incriminating per se, *yet*, he has just indirectly arranged someone's death. Or a serious injury, if they're lucky. He doesn't know who that someone is going to end up being, which is what's causing his body to shiver and sweat.

Hannibal is an experienced killer, surely he can take on one unarmed bodyguard. Then again, the guard has the element of surprise against Hannibal. With a nauseating twist in his

stomach, Will wonders which of his pristine suits Hannibal would be dressed in at his funeral, if he were to die tonight.

During the second intermission, Will nurses his second whiskey for the night and lurks amidst the crowd, restlessly waiting for Mrs. Nolan and her protector to make a move. Will watches Hannibal too, noticing when the man goes to the restroom. Like clockwork, the guard follows Hannibal, and before entering the bathroom, he attaches a handwritten “out of order” sign to the door.

Will raises an eyebrow in amusement. Picking the only place in this building with no security cameras, and directing other opera guests to go empty their bladders elsewhere? Very clever, mister Hired Muscle. If Will had to plan a spontaneous attack like this, he’d do it in the bathroom too.

He downs his drink and immediately wishes he had another. The murder weapon feels hot in his pocket, burning his skin. He doesn’t feel bad about arranging for Hannibal to have his ass kicked — or possibly killed. Will really doesn’t give a fuck. It’s murdering the lady that makes his throat feel dry. Will has no issues pulling triggers since it’s detached and impersonal; he never gets any blood on his hands, at least not literally speaking. This is different, he’d have to get close to her, possibly even see the look in her eyes as he does it.

He doesn’t exactly know what kind of cue he’s waiting for, but he trusts his professional instinct to tell him when to strike. The cue comes soon enough, in the form of Mrs. Nolan’s bodyguard scrambling out the restroom, covered in blood and bruises. He collapses on the floor, clutching at a wound in his neck. A concerning amount of blood is gushing out of it and staining his shirt. Will strains his eyes to see a small object stuck in the side of the poor man’s throat.

A ballpoint pen. *Jesus.*

Will makes a mental note never to piss off Hannibal again, since he can evidently use absolutely any common object in his reach as a murder weapon.

There are a few screams, and a group of people congregates around the dying man in their futile attempts to help. Some others gasp in terror and stagger on their feet to leave the building. The idyllic evening of Baltimore’s high society quickly turns into chaos.

Chaos is every criminal’s best friend, and Will is no exception. As he slides his hand into his pocket and takes a few breaths to compose himself, he catches a glimpse of his arch enemy, inconspicuously slipping out of the bathroom. Hannibal looks like he just had his ass handed to him. As he fucking deserves. However, he doesn’t appear to be in a life-threatening condition, and Will feels more relieved than he’d expected.

His plan is working so far. Hannibal successfully incapacitated the bodyguard that stood between Will and his target, leaving the woman exposed. Poor Mrs. Nolan looks utterly petrified. Her hand holding yet another martini is shaking profoundly, while the other is frantically trying to fish a phone out of her handbag and call for backup. Will knows he doesn’t have much time left. If he misses his opportunity, this has all been for nothing.

He approaches her from behind, fingers clasped around the small but lethal device in his pocket so tightly that his entire arm feels numb. What a wonderful thing medical auto-injectors can be with a little tampering; all he needs to do is press it against her thigh, push the button, and let the needle do its job.

She turns around with a jerk, but Will's job is already done. He ducks down to hide his face as he quickly escapes into the crowd of panicking aristocrats. He heads straight for the doors and out into the chilling night air, not looking back. She will die within a few minutes, and even medical professionals won't be able to help her without the right antidote kit.

Will's ears are still ringing from all the screaming as he walks briskly towards his car, parked on a quiet side street for a quick getaway. The performance hall's underground car park would take a million years to get out of, with all the opera-goers trying to leave at the same time.

As Will turns around the corner, he realises that perhaps his getaway won't be as easy as he'd anticipated.

Hannibal is standing by his car, his charming but deadly side profile illuminated by one lone street light. His long overcoat is hiding the blood-soaked suit, and he's wiped the red stains off his face and hair so that it wouldn't draw attention. He's like the devil in a person suit; appearing like a normal human on the outside but hiding blood and violence on the inside. Will would roll his eyes at the theatricality of it all, if he wasn't frozen in place with shock.

"You know, Will, I looked forward to seeing that performance without interruptions," Hannibal says, a hint of annoyance present in his tone.

"And I looked forward to having a peaceful evening, but instead I was jumped right in front of my house. We can't always have what we want, can we?" Will bites back.

Evidently, his cheeky tongue doesn't care if Hannibal has another ballpoint pen in his possession. Will often wonders how his smartass attitude hasn't gotten him killed yet, but he doesn't plan on stopping his bold act either.

"Hm. It appears that we're even, then," Hannibal states, menacingly casual.

"And I'm happy to leave it as that," Will retorts. He strides forward and around Hannibal to get to his car door. "Now if you'll excuse me."

Hannibal takes a step to the side so he's standing in Will's way again; a wordless indication that the conversation isn't over yet. As the street lamp reflects off the man's amber eyes, Will catches a dangerous glint in them. *For fuck's sake.*

"I was hoping you'd choose a more personalised approach for your revenge," Hannibal continues, "You don't strike me as a man that would use a proxy."

"You're not worthy of my personalised approach."

Will doesn't miss the way Hannibal's lip twitches momentarily, as if he's genuinely upset by Will's words. What an overdramatic son of a bitch.

"Is that so?" Hannibal muses. "I thought it may rather be because you needed someone to be the disposable pawn in your contract mission."

Of course Hannibal figured it out. Will barks out a laugh. He hopes it hurts Hannibal, being treated like something *disposable*.

"My earlier point still stands," he answers.

There's no visible signs of hurt on Hannibal's face now, but that doesn't mean he doesn't feel it deep inside. The man just tilts his head to the side and examines Will with that infuriating curiosity that's so on-brand for him.

"Are congratulations in order?" Hannibal asks eventually, offering Will a small smile.

"I never fail my assignments." Will hopes it sounds as intimidating as he intended it.

Instead, Hannibal's smile widens.

"I am sure you were magnificent," he says with the same adoring voice he'd use after licking Will's release off his lips after delivering the most spectacular fellatio. "Please indulge me, how did you do it?"

How could Will not indulge him? Hannibal is preventing him from getting in his car and leaving, and Will doesn't have any weapons left to defend himself with, should he have to. He brought his gun, like he always does when he goes out on a mission, but he had to leave it in the glovebox of his car. Fucking metal detectors. And now, Hannibal's dauntingly tall and broad form is standing between him and his beloved clutch for safety in the shape of a Glock 19.

"An Epipen loaded with cyanide," Will answers, pulling his face into a little devious smirk.

He would like to take credit for the idea of replacing epinephrine in the medical injector with poison, but it would be dishonest. As unbelievable as it sounds, and despite having the entire dark web at his disposal with its resources on how to get away with murder, he got the idea from Quora.

"What a cunning boy," Hannibal comments, the adoration from before still present in his voice.

Of course, a deviant like Hannibal would *praise* Will for adding another name to his conscience. Will's job pays his bills, it's as simple as that. Murdering people isn't something to be proud for. Will feels his blood begin to boil.

With two lightning-fast steps, he's on Hannibal, grabbing the front of his coat and pushing the man against the nearest wall.

"Don't fucking call me that," Will hisses, his face inches away from Hannibal's.

They're chest to chest, so close that he can practically smell the intoxicating scent of blood glistening on Hannibal's still fresh facial injuries. The man stares back at Will with his typical unperturbed fashion, which only aggravates Will further.

"Why not? That's what you are," Hannibal points out.

He's got to know he's really pushing his luck right now, provoking Will like that. Will scowls and pushes his fingers deeper into where he's gripping the lapels of Hannibal's coat, just under his collarbones. A sharp intake of breath betrays Hannibal's otherwise intact composure. He figures Hannibal was punched in that spot earlier, or something like that. Jackpot. Will is hitting him where it hurts. Literally.

"What are you going to do, Will?" Hannibal speaks again, eyebrows rising in amusement. "Send another proxy?"

"No, I'll kill you myself," Will growls low in his throat.

Because he could. Now would be a perfect opportunity, since Hannibal is already in a bad state, probably hiding more bruises and fractures under his clothes than Will would imagine. However, Will is smarter than letting uncontrolled rage possess him; he doesn't want another person's blood on his hands. Not tonight.

He lets go of Hannibal and takes a step back, chest heaving with the pent-up adrenaline. Hannibal straightens his clothes and smiles pleasantly at Will.

"I would hope so. How about on Friday, 7pm? Dinner will be served, of course."

If Will didn't know Hannibal, he'd assume the man is being sarcastic. But no, it would be totally Hannibal-like to offer him dinner if Will showed up at his house planning to kill him.

"No fucking way," Will seethes.

Hannibal's response is drowned out by a cacophony of police and ambulance sirens approaching the murder scene of their making. If everything had gone to plan, Will would've already been on his way home before the authorities arrived. But of course, Hannibal had to ruin that.

"We both should go," Will says, trying not to show how unnerved he suddenly feels.

With Hannibal out of the way now, he opens the car door and climbs inside. Just as he is about to pull it closed behind him, an arm reaches out and jerks it open again.

Hannibal's voice is the complete opposite to the death grip he has on the door; sweet and coaxing. Almost hopeful. "Will I see you on Friday?"

Will is itching to leave, and trying to wrench Hannibal's hands off his car would only delay him and attract attention.

"Sure, whatever," he resigns from behind gritted teeth. "Now get off my car."

Hannibal complies. Will starts the engine and drives off, as fast as he can without looking suspicious.

He has absolutely no intention of going anywhere on Friday night. Hannibal can have the company of nothing but punishing loneliness at his dinner. And hopefully choke on it.

Chapter End Notes

The marriage of Figaro actually has 1 intermission, but we can pretend it's 2 for the sake of the plot haha.

What do you think is going to happen next? Is Will going to go to the dinner? Is Hannibal going to retaliate? Tell me in the comments!

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

There is immediate recognition in Hannibal's eyes, and his eyebrows rise, just the tiniest fraction, but Will still notices. And he loves what he sees. Catching the infamous Hannibal Lecter off guard is wonderful, and Will is only getting started with putting unexpected pressure on the man.

Chapter Notes

I recently learned what Hanahaki disease is. As a result, Hannibal is going to draw some inspiration from it for his attempts to "court" Will.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On Friday night, Will pointedly stands Hannibal up for their dinner plans. The man has to be stupid to expect him to actually be there. Will sleeps with a gun under his pillow that night, fearing that Hannibal would come to his house after realising he was never going to show up.

However, nobody disturbs his peace, not through the night or even the next morning. Still, Will expects retaliation to occur sooner or later. He wants to stay in all day, holed up with his firearms and the pack of dogs that wouldn't hesitate to defend him if need be. Unfortunately, Will has a few errands to run for his flourishing hitman business.

He meets up with the contact from that Nolan lady job. As he predicted, the paramedics were unable to save the poor woman from the cyanide poisoning that night, and Will receives the sizable paycheck he was promised. Next, he spends several long hours stalking and preparing his hit on his other target, the man in the file Z gave him. It would be a normal day in his life as a freelance assassin, except that Will is waiting for Hannibal to ambush him like he did after the mission at the opera. However, nothing happens.

Nothing happens until the evening, when Will returns home. There's another bouquet of roses on his doorstep. Will isn't surprised when the accompanying card spells out a new date for their dinner. Thursday the 23rd of April, at 7pm. A cursive sentence at the bottom asks him to "please RSVP via text message."

Will lets out an irritated groan and rubs a hand across his face. He doesn't bother mailing the flowers back to Hannibal like last time, nor RSVP-ing in any other shape or form. The bouquet is going straight in the trash. It's a shame, since objectively speaking, the roses are

actually very pretty; the petals are white at the base and gradually turn deep crimson-red towards the tip. It looks as if the originally white flower is stained with blood. It's beautiful and poetic, but also causes a chill run down Will's spine. Very on-brand for Hannibal.

The next 24 hours pass without further incidents. Will returns home after another day of stalking, to find — to his immense relief — no roses or other gifts on his front porch. Surely Hannibal isn't delusional enough to think that Will is going to accept the dinner invitation, despite not informing him via text as requested. If so, the man must be plain stupid.

Will sighs and checks his mail on the way from the car to the house. There's the usual array of bills and some pointless advertisements that he can discard right away. There is also something else.

Three roses, placed neatly inside the mailbox. They're the same kind Hannibal sent him the day prior; pearly-white bleeding into scarlet-red. The card tied to the stems of the flowers reiterates the invitation for Thursday, using the same wording as the last card: "Please RSVP via text message." However, this time, the 'please' is underlined, and the sentence continues to sternly specify that Will is required to respond by the end of today.

Will scoffs. There is no way he's going to do that. Again, the roses end up in the trash, and again, Will's evening ends up soured by Hannibal's infuriating persistence.

The next day, Will stays in the house, only heading out after the sun has set again. It's time to complete his mission. This guy is going to be a piece of cake to kill. Every day after work, he visits the gym. There is no one using the equipment at this hour, but apart from the quietude, Will doesn't see any benefits to exercising so late at night. Indeed, the man's poor choices in terms of daily routine are going to cost him his life.

The surroundings of the suburban gym are going to be conveniently deserted, and Will anticipates it being laughably easy to shoot the man as he walks from the building to his car. Will won't even need to find a stable surface to anchor the bipod of his rifle onto; the hood of his own car will do. Just like any regular person when presented with easy money, he chuckles to himself as he heads out to the mission.

No fucking flowers today either, Will notes while briefly checking the front porch and the mailbox. This day is shaping up to be excellent.

Will climbs into his car, dropping his backpack containing the disassembled rifle on the passenger seat. Just as he sets his eyes ahead onto the steering wheel, his cheerful mood deflates immediately. On the dashboard, in front of the speedometer, lies a card. It takes Will one quick glance to find the roses too, carefully arranged across the back seat.

Will curses himself for ever associating with such a stubborn piece of shit.

Is Hannibal really going to keep ordering expensive bouquets to his house every day until he responds? Unfortunately for Hannibal, Will is just as stubborn. He's determined to play the game forever, if that's what it takes for Hannibal to leave him alone. He hopes that eventually Hannibal will stop wasting his money on fruitless attempts to earn back Will's affection.

Though, at the back of his mind, Will wonders how much longer this shitshow will last, and if Hannibal's acts of courtship will get more creative — and threatening — than simple flowers.

The late-night quest goes smoothly. With every name Will adds to his kill count, the protests of his conscience get quieter and quieter. Maybe the exorbitant amounts of cash he receives for his troubles have something to do with it, maybe not. Maybe he's just a morally corrupt asshole that treats people's lives as nothing but an opportunity to make a living.

In the morning, Will informs Z that the job is complete and arranges a meeting to collect his reward. The body part he brings this time — a loose tooth — is a considerably less gnarly souvenir than a kidney, and Z looks more relieved than he'd probably like to admit.

Will uses the money to treat his dogs to new toys, and himself to a new fishing rod that he's been wanting to buy for a while. He tests it out right away, spending the afternoon by the river near his house. He doesn't encounter any more roses, thankfully. As Will gets ready for sleep, he allows himself a small sliver of hope that Hannibal has given up. He knows he's being deceptively optimistic, but he hasn't seen a single flower all day.

Sleep doesn't come easily, and Will tosses and turns for hours, struggling to get comfortable. There is something odd about his pillow, too; it feels like his head is resting on a pile of leaves.

Leaves.

With a mortified expression on his face, Will shoves a hand inside the pillowcase, pulling out a heap of loose rose petals and leaves.

He really, *really*, should've bashed Hannibal's face in that night after the opera, when he had the chance.

Will has had enough of this, enough of being the target of Hannibal's relentless harassment disguised as romantic gestures. But he can't exactly give in and ask the man to stop either. So, putting up with it is the only answer.

Can this get any worse?

As it turns out, it can get worse. Much, much worse.

Will doesn't encounter any sign of roses the next day either, but believing that Hannibal has finally stopped would be a delusion. As the day progresses, Will becomes increasingly unnerved. More flowers are coming, they *must* be. But Will doesn't know where, how, and when he is going to find them, and the uncertainty is making him feel sick.

He even refrains from having whiskey after dinner, even though it's part of his evening routine. Will already feels nauseous enough from the unpleasant anticipation, and he figures that alcohol would upset his stomach even more. Maybe the leftover lasagna he ate for dinner had gone bad after sitting in his fridge for too long, and is thus partially responsible for the queasiness he's feeling.

Will scrambles on his feet, almost accidentally stepping on one of his dog's tail, as he suddenly feels bile rising up his throat. He rushes into the kitchen, reaching the sink just in time before violently coughing up the contents of his stomach. As he blinks the tears out of his eyes, he makes a mental note not to buy that lasagna again.

Then, his vision clears up and zeroes in on the remnants of his cursed dinner in the sink. Among the half-digested chunks of lasagna, he can make out foreign pieces, exhibiting the colour pattern he has seen way too many times in the past few days.

"What the actual fuck?" Will whispers with a revolting chill shaking up his entire body.

What he sees is unmistakable; the familiar-looking rose petals were somehow stuffed into his food. There is no card accompanying the flowers this time, but the message is crystal clear. Will curses out loud and drowns out the taste of roses with a generous amount of mouthwash.

He wants to scream. Not only does Hannibal break into Will's house on a regular basis, but he also succeeded in *feeding* the damn roses to Will. What's next? Hannibal creeping into his bedroom at night and showing the petals down his throat until he chokes? Will doesn't want to find out.

He's putting a stop to this. Tomorrow.

Adam Towers has an appointment with Dr. Hannibal Lecter on the 21st of April, at 3 o'clock. At quarter to three, Will walks up to the clinic. At 2:45 p.m., he is ready, waiting outside the consultation room. At exactly 3:00 p.m., Hannibal opens the door.

There is immediate recognition in his eyes, and his eyebrows rise, just the tiniest fraction, but Will still notices. And he loves what he sees. Catching the infamous Hannibal Lecter off guard is wonderful, and Will is only getting started with putting unexpected pressure on the man.

"Hello, Adam," Hannibal greets, his composure back just as quickly as it crumpled, "Please come in."

No immediate confrontation? No chastising Will for booking an appointment under a fake name? Instead, Hannibal seems to be happy to play along, following whatever game Will has

devised. Unfortunately for him, Will designs his games so that there is no way the poor doctor can win.

“What brings you to me?” Hannibal asks once they’ve settled into two wide armchairs positioned in the middle of the room, facing each other.

“I’ve been having trouble sleeping,” Will says with an exaggerated sigh.

“I see.” Hannibal gives him a sympathetic nod. “Nightmares?”

“No, not quite. Just can’t stop my thoughts from racing.” Will enhances his portrayal of an anxiety-riddled Adam by bouncing his leg restlessly as he looks up to Hannibal.

“Do you think about anything in particular?”

Outwardly, there is nothing to suggest that Hannibal is itching to find out where all of this is going, to understand what Will is trying to achieve by tricking his way into Hannibal’s therapy room like this. But Will can tell that the man is dying to know. Being surprised like this must be driving Hannibal insane.

“Yes, actually,” Will purrs with a small smile dancing on his lips. “Not long ago, I witnessed something... criminal.”

Hannibal is watching him like a hawk now, sharp eyes trying to pierce through Will’s facade.

“Tell me about it.”

“I was out at the docks one night and I saw someone murder a man,” Will informs him, voice down to a whisper. “Doctor, I am *terrified* .”

Will deliberately makes his voice crack on the last word, having tremendous fun pretending to be scared to the bone. He bites his lip and averts his eyes, letting them wander over the lavish interior of the office. He doesn’t need to look at Hannibal to know that the man’s face is staying perfectly neutral. Behind it, no doubt, the cogs of his brain are working overtime to keep up with Will’s spectacle.

“And you know what the worst part is?” Will continues. Once he meets Hannibal’s eyes again, he drops the act, staring right past the man’s pitch-black pupils, deep into his soul. “I saw his face.”

The subtle widening of those pupils is the only thing that tells Will that Hannibal is finally catching on. Though, apart from that little subconscious piece of body language, he remains fully professional, flawlessly playing the role of a kind-hearted and approachable psychiatrist.

“No wonder why you can’t sleep,” Hannibal concludes. His compassionate tone would be believable, if Will didn’t know that it is utterly fake.

“Yeah. I need your advice, doctor,” Will says. The nervous Adam Towers is back, fiddling with his hands and chewing on the frame of his glasses. “I don’t know if I should tell the

police what I saw.”

This time, Hannibal’s reaction is more noticeable. His fingers tighten around the clipboard with notes that he is holding as he becomes aware of the thinly veiled threat Will is making.

“Do you have any reason not to?” he asks. Just like any law-abiding and morally upright psychiatrist would.

And of course, any law-abiding and morally upright citizen in Will’s position would have immediately reported what they saw to the authorities. Will, however, is used to operating on the flipside of the law, and would therefore save this piece of sensitive information until an opportunity came to get personal benefits out of it.

“I guess I just wanted to run it by you before making any *rash decisions*,” Will replies and lets a small smirk settle onto his lips.

His words are met with pleasant amusement from Hannibal. Will deduces the good doctor must be relieved that the threat is only hypothetical at this stage.

“Very well. Did this killer see your face too?”

“Yeah,” Will answers sullenly.

There is no limit to how much he wishes that wasn’t the case. Will wishes Hannibal never saw his face, and wishes they never met. Not because he’s afraid of the consequences of getting up close and personal with another killer, but because he’s had enough of this incessant game of rose-coloured cat-and-mouse.

If all goes to plan, Will is finally going to put a stop to it. In this very room.

“In that case, I understand your reluctance regarding alerting the authorities,” Hannibal points out delicately, “I imagine you’re worried that you will be his next target.”

In response to that, Will makes a point to raise his eyebrows as far up as they can go and let his jaw drop.

“Are you telling me to stay quiet and disregard my civil duty to report crime, Dr. Lecter?”

“As your psychiatrist, Adam, I can’t tell you what to do,” Hannibal elaborates, setting the clipboard down on the table next to him. He keeps the pen, though, and holds it up at Will’s eye level, idly twirling it between his fingers. “But I can offer suggestions based on what I believe is in your best interest.”

The way the ballpoint pen is pivoting between Hannibal’s fingers is so casual, almost absent-minded. Nobody would think of it twice. But the events at the opera are still fresh in Will’s mind, so he knows it’s far from an unintentional gesture.

A counter-threat.

Will doesn't let it alarm him. There is no way Hannibal is going to attack him in the middle of the day, in his office that is located on a busy street. The chances of getting away with murdering his own patient without complications would be too slim. Besides, Will has one more trick up his sleeve.

"Maybe you're right, then," he plays along, watching Hannibal from behind his glasses. "But I've got some photos, too."

The pen halts its slow oscillation as Hannibal's fingers clench around it.

Will leans forward, closing as much distance between them as he can without leaving his chair. He anchors his elbows on his knees, and pushes the glasses out of the way for uninterrupted eye contact.

"I'm a nocturnal wildlife photographer, you see. My high-quality zoom lens can catch even the smallest details of the *predator species in action*." Will keeps his voice casual, but he knows his words are bound to make the man in front of him squirm. "And before you tell me I'm being reckless, I've arranged for my photos to be sent right to the police if anything happens to me."

Hannibal blinks. Once, twice. Then he regards Will with a tight smile.

"Well played, *Adam*."

An internal triumphant chuckle reverberates through Will's body, but he's too cautious to let it out. The game isn't over yet.

"Do you think the killer would leave me alone if he knew I have those pictures?" he asks as nonchalantly as he can.

"I would believe so, yes." Hannibal sounds unperturbed as always, but Will can tell he hates every minute of this. Hates every minute of *losing*.

Will supposes this is as close as they can get to an impasse. A truce, of sorts. Hannibal can go back to killing people for food, and Will can go back to killing people for money. They will never have to see each other again.

"Good. Thank you, doctor," Will draws in a saccharine tone and slowly gets up from his seat, stretching his tense muscles.

"The pleasure is mine. Can I help with anything else today?" Hannibal says, while making no attempt to rise from his chair. "Our hour isn't up yet."

"No, that would be all. You can bill me for the full hour, I don't mind."

Will makes his way to the door, but Hannibal remains seated. Isn't it extremely rude not to walk your patient to the door as you're bidding farewell? Or to stand up for a goodbye handshake, at the very least? What a hypocrite. Will rolls his eyes.

Oh, well. Hannibal's lack of manners isn't going to be Will's concern for much longer. His hand curls around the doorknob and twists.

The door doesn't budge.

"Do you lock all your patients in?" he asks in an annoyed huff.

Beneath the layer of annoyance, his stomach drops.

"Like I said, your hour isn't up yet, *Will*."

The way Hannibal's lips speak Will's name sends shivers down his spine. It seems sweet and innocent on the surface, but reeks of danger underneath.

Will swallows and turns to face his pseudo-psychiatrist again.

"I must insist that you let me go. Lest my associates think I'm in trouble and release the pictures."

It takes Will everything he's got to keep his voice even. There is no way he can let Hannibal have the satisfaction of successfully intimidating him. He's no longer smiling, but nor is he shaking in fear. In the grand scheme of things, his reaction to being trapped in a room by a bloodthirsty serial murderer could've been a lot less dignified.

"You don't have any pictures," Hannibal states plainly. So plainly that the matter-of-factness of it makes Will break into sweat. "Nor do you have associates."

Fuck.

"Excuse me?" Will challenges, raising his chin defiantly. He's decided to bluff in this game, so he has to keep going with the act until the end.

A complacent smirk spreads onto Hannibal's face. "You told me before that you work alone."

"Unlock the fucking door, Hannibal."

The words come out sounding a lot less assertive and convincing than Will intended. Even if they hadn't, the request would be futile anyway. Hannibal won't let him go. And with increasing fear for his life, Will realises that Hannibal was never going to.

His plan has backfired, and very badly so. Why did he ever think walking right into the lion's den would be a smart idea?

"You will be able to leave the premises once we are finished, let me assure you," Hannibal informs him in his calm but nonetheless menacing manner.

Yeah, leave the premises in a fucking body bag.

The door is thick and heavy, made of some sturdy wood. Breaking it isn't an option. There are no other doors, so the only other escape route would be the windows along the opposite wall. If Will can somehow get past Hannibal, who is still lingering in the middle of the room, and make it to the window, he could have a fair chance at leaving this place unharmed.

"What are you planning to do for the rest of the hour?" Will asks as neutrally as he can, while slowly moving away from the door.

With inconspicuousness to his step, he walks to the colossal bookshelf embedded in the wall and pretends to browse the books carefully arranged on it.

"You came to me for therapy, Will, so that is exactly what we are going to do."

Will lets out a morbid-sounding scowl-laugh. "You won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed."

"I am not intending to psychoanalyze you," Hannibal explains, putting the pen down beside the clipboard. "I would simply like to talk."

The action reassures Will more than he would like to admit. At the very least, it looks like he isn't going to be another victim of slaughter-by-ballpoint-pen, much like the unlucky bodyguard at the opera. Though, knowing Hannibal's predilections for ruthless savagery, Will isn't sure if this turn of events is a blessing or a curse.

"Talk about what?" he queries with his best attempt at nonchalant curiosity.

Will couldn't care less what his deranged captor-psychiatrist-fuckbuddy wants to talk about, but the question buys him time. He keeps his eyes on the books while his feet slowly but surely carry him closer and closer to the window.

"You so very rudely declining my invitations to dinner," Hannibal replies, standing up from his seat in one fluid, elegant movement.

With a profound chill rattling his bones, Will realises that he must now drastically expedite his journey towards his escape, if he wants to get out alive.

"I'm not interested in continuing our arrangement."

"Why so?" Hannibal enquires, melodramatic disappointment evident in his features as he takes a step, bringing him closer to Will. "You agreed that we are even, which means our offenses against each other can be wiped from the record."

Will scoffs. That's not how it works. Hannibal tried to have him *killed*. And Will organising to have Hannibal almost killed in return was a fitting revenge act. However, it doesn't undo the irreparable damage to their relationship, or whatever the fuck their casual sex arrangement was.

While Will is busy condemning Hannibal to the deepest layers of hell where he belongs, the man manages to take a few more silent but quick steps. Before Will realises, Hannibal is close enough to touch him.

Close enough to kill him with his bare hands.

As his lips spell out a venomous “fuck off” into the man’s face, Will evaluates his options.

Take the gun. Shoot the window, shattering the glass. Run and jump.

Hannibal’s office is on the second floor of the building, so the likelihood of jumping out and not getting severely injured looks quite small. However, staying here and ending up murdered — and undoubtedly cannibalised — by a psychopathic ex-lover would be much, much worse.

As Will stares at Hannibal, he notices the man’s eyes flick towards the window, and back at Will.

His plan has been exposed. He needs to act now, before it’s too late.

Will knows it’s a stupid idea. He wouldn’t get very far before Hannibal tackled him to the ground. He is sensible enough to know when the prospects of him succeeding are non-existent. But perhaps, Adam Towers isn’t. Maybe, this nosy little photographer man is more reckless than he looks, and decides to take the chance against all the odds. And maybe that godsent impulsive recklessness is just what’s going to save his life.

Will’s hand moves with lightning-speed and curls around the handle of his gun, hidden in the inside pocket of his jacket. Hannibal’s reaction is just as fast, elbow swinging out to interfere with the trajectory of Will’s now weaponized arm.

And in that moment, another strategy occurs to Will, with the kind of undisputed clarity that only happens when one’s brain is full of nothing but the survival instinct.

Shoot the doctor. Find the key and open the door. Let the police look for a murderer named Adam Towers, who doesn’t exist.

Will changes his intentions mid-movement, sharply retracting his arm and shoving the gun right into Hannibal’s face. Hannibal freezes, his narrowed eyes drilling into Will’s.

Will’s finger is on the trigger. *Shoot the doctor.*

He could. He would. And he sure as hell should.

But will he?

Chapter End Notes

As always I'm eager to hear everyone's thoughts about the chapter. Did you like/hate the roses? What do you think is going to happen next?

Also, if you're familiar with the HEU (Hannibal extended universe) you may have noticed the little cameo! Adam Towers is a character Hugh Dancy played in another movie. It's such a common white male name that I couldn't resist using it as Will's alias haha

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's fingers grip the sides of the ladder, where Will has cornered him. Will's fingers grip the gun, where he's pressing it into Hannibal's face.

"Do you point a gun at all your lovers?" Hannibal asks, breaking the tense silence between them.

Chapter Notes

The "ladder scene" is such an iconic Hannigram moment, so here is my attempt at reimagining the scene. In short, things get a bit heated on that ladder. Hope you enjoy! ~

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal's fingers grip the sides of the ladder, where Will has cornered him. Will's fingers grip the gun, where he's pressing it into Hannibal's face.

"Do you point a gun at all your lovers?" Hannibal asks, breaking the tense silence between them.

He swallows, causing the barrel pushed under his jaw to shift with the movement of his Adam's apple. Will could almost mistake it for the man being scared, if it wasn't a deliberate action, slow and pronounced, almost like Hannibal wanted the bob of his throat to reverberate through the metal of the weapon and into Will's hand. As much as Will wants to, he can't describe the intention as anything other than purposefully seductive. And he hates it with burning passion.

"You're not my *lover*. Never were," Will scoffs in disbelief.

Hannibal has no right to use any term containing the word 'love' to describe them. He has no right, because he's never even tried to kiss Will.

"You're just a number in my phone that I call when I want to get laid," Will hisses sharply from behind his teeth.

He's still not quite convinced that he is going to fire his gun, but there is nothing stopping him from firing his words. He hopes they hurt Hannibal as much as he intends them to.

If it hurts, Hannibal doesn't show it. He stays still, watching Will with a peculiar look in his wide, attentive eyes. Will can't yet decode what that peculiarity means.

"Oh, my number is still saved in your phone?" Hannibal asks, the ambiguous expression changing into an amused half-smile. "That tells me you are not as resolute about terminating our arrangement as it previously seemed."

Will takes a step closer so that their bodies are now pressed against each other, and shoves the gun further into the soft flesh between Hannibal's neck and chin.

"I'm as resolute as you can get," he seethes, "If you ever step foot on my property again, or leave me more of those creepy roses, I swear to god —"

Will's threat is suddenly cut off mid-sentence when he feels something.

Something that most definitely shouldn't be there. Surely his mind is playing tricks on him and it isn't. But the longer Will thinks about it, the more he becomes convinced that it, in fact, is. It's painfully obvious, and in some sick way, totally plausible and on-brand for Hannibal. Right there, concealed by layers of clothing, but still unmistakably pressing against his thigh, is Hannibal's rock-hard erection.

"— I swear to *fucking* god," Will restates numbly. The earlier vindictive fury in his brain has now been replaced by something completely different.

"Then what, Will?" Hannibal prompts when it starts to look like no more words are going to leave Will's mouth. "You didn't finish your threat."

"This is turning you on," Will deadpans, completely disregarding the question.

Hannibal casts his eyes downward, as if he wasn't already aware of the state of his body. "To claim otherwise would not only be blatantly incorrect, but also a missed opportunity to introduce a pleasant turn to our unexpected meeting today."

Will jerks the weapon upwards, the barrel pushing Hannibal's chin up to what must be an uncomfortable angle. In retrospect, the gesture would have felt far more domineering if Will was the taller of the two of them. Now, it just means he can't see the man's face properly anymore.

"We're not doing this here. No fucking way," Will growls, staring at the knot of Hannibal's tie, for lack of a better place to lay his eyes on.

"Why not? You have made it abundantly clear that you don't wish to accept my dinner invitations, but that doesn't mean propositions of a different nature are out of question."

They are, Will wants to say, *definitely out of question*. However, he doesn't get a chance to verbalise the thought because in that moment, Hannibal's large palms settle on his ass, giving the flesh there a light squeeze. Will stifles an instinctual moan that almost manages to escape from his mouth. Of course, Hannibal knows his buttons, and of course, he uses that knowledge to his advantage.

Will needs to back off before those sinful hands try anything else. But backing off would mean putting distance between Hannibal and the gun, which would be equivalent to chickening out, and that isn't what Will wants to do at all. Hannibal squeezes again, this time targeting the front of Will's pants, and Will lets out a low-pitched whine before he can stop himself.

Although Will still can't see his face, he can tell that Hannibal is smiling in his infuriating, self-congratulatory way.

"The key to successful therapy for patients who harbour excessive anger is to help them find their *release*," the man says, and it sounds almost like a purr of a wild animal in heat.

"I'll release these bullets into your face if you don't shut up."

Hannibal casts his eyes down to the gun barrel, then back at Will. "I sincerely hope that is an erotic allegory."

"Shut the *fuck* up," Will snarls and retracts the weapon, only to shove it into Hannibal's mouth a second later.

The intrusion works wonders at stopping Hannibal from talking. However, it seems to work wonders on another part of his body too; Will feels an enthusiastic twitch where his thigh meets Hannibal's groin.

Hannibal tilts his head to free his mouth and lets the barrel rest against his cheekbone instead. For the first time since Will drew the weapon, he seems visibly dissatisfied with where Will is pointing it.

"If you must still hold me at gunpoint, I would appreciate it if you aimed it somewhere other than my mouth."

Will's eyes narrow. "And why's that?"

The question quickly becomes redundant as Hannibal gracefully lowers himself down onto his knees, and both his hands find the button of Will's jeans.

"Is this some kind of a perverted way of apologising for all the shit you caused earlier?" Will asks in an incredulous huff.

"You may consider it so, if it helps you," Hannibal replies nonchalantly as his fingers work the button and the zipper open.

Will has seen and done some extremely weird things in his life, but he has never received an apology in the form of a blowjob before. And frankly, the prospect seems quite appealing. Besides, it's probably the best and only kind of apology he will get from Hannibal. The man seems too proud and remorseless to ask for forgiveness with words, like normal people. So, being blown in Hannibal's office is as good as it's ever going to get in terms of making up for what he's put Will through.

As much as Will resents him, he knows from experience that Hannibal's fellatio skills would attain first place in the world championship of dick-sucking, if it was a real sport. If Will is going to get his revenge by violently shoving his cock down the man's throat and making him choke on it, it will be just as satisfying as any other retribution plan he may have had in mind, if not more.

He feels his jeans and underwear being pulled down to his knees, and warm breath tickling the exposed skin. Hannibal maneuvers them around so that Will is the one backed against the ladder now. It's probably for the best, as he's going to need something to clutch onto in order to keep himself upright.

Hannibal starts with devilish teasing, as to be expected from a smug asshole like him; sliding his fingers and tongue along the length of Will's cock at an excruciatingly slow speed. It takes several long minutes, a litany of profanities from Will, and his hand tugging Hannibal's hair sharply, for the man to finally stop whatever badly-timed attempt at foreplay that is. When he finally lets Will slide past his lips into the welcoming warmth of his mouth, another array of curses echo in the room.

The ecstatic sensation makes Will crudely buck his hips further into Hannibal's face, which is exactly what he deserves so Will doesn't even try to stop it. Hannibal, however, does. His hands wrap around Will's hipbones and pin them against the ladder, the narrow wooden step digging almost painfully into Will's ass. The hold is strong, effectively rendering Will's midsection immobile.

His body is stretched along the length of the ladder, the incline of it tilting his pelvis forward and his head back. The angle could be worse, all things considered; Will gets an unobstructed view of Hannibal's lips undulating along the middle of his cock with a languid pace. The motion feels good, sure, but it's not tight or fast enough to get Will off. *Such a fucking tease.*

"Do it like you mean it," Will grunts.

He slides the gun that's still somehow in his hand to point right between Hannibal's eyes. He nudges it, for good measure, grinding the end of the barrel into the furrows of Hannibal's forehead. The gesture elicits an unexpectedly eager moan from Hannibal, vibrating in his throat and spilling out from between his outstretched lips. Will rolls his eyes.

"Guns lack intimacy? You are so full of shit," he drawls, mockingly repeating the words Hannibal had said to him during one of their post-dinner-and-sex conversations all those weeks ago.

Hannibal looks up at him, something dark flashing behind his eyes.

"The reason you don't like using firearms when you kill is because you can't stop yourself from popping a boner every time you see one," Will continues with a wide smirk on his face, knowing he's hit the nail on the head.

"You're a freak with a gun fetish, Dr. Lecter. How's that for psychoanalysis?"

The dark undertone in Hannibal's gaze grows more menacing, and the next time his mouth sinks down, Will feels a graze of teeth against the delicate skin of his cock. Not enough to cause damage, but enough to hurt and send out a warning. Will jolts and hisses, instinctively swatting Hannibal's head away with a movement that resembles a slap to the face. A stinging slap, but with the sturdy metal of the gun instead of the palm of Will's hand.

Hannibal's features contort as the magazine collides with his cheekbone, and he momentarily pinches his eyes shut. Will holds his breath.

"Use your teeth again and I'll fucking end you," he grunts sternly and tightens his other hand in Hannibal's hair. He's the one with a loaded gun; he can afford to make demands.

"No, you won't," comes Hannibal's calm but breathy reply. His face has disappeared between Will's thighs, nosing and licking around his balls. "You enjoy this too much to end it."

And Will does. It would be pointless to argue otherwise. "Then get back to it before I change my mind."

Hannibal flashes him a deeply-pleased smile that somehow exudes air of superiority. Will struggles to believe how one can consider himself superior while on his knees and sucking off another man at gunpoint. Evidently, Hannibal must feel like he has the upper hand in the situation. And evidently, it means Will needs to change that.

Will tangles his fingers deeper into the fine hair on Hannibal's head, and pushes it back onto his throbbing cock that is now more desperate for a release than ever. Hannibal goes down willingly, but when Will yanks him back by the hair and thrusts all the way into his throat, he lets out a sound of protest.

"Put your hands on the ladder. Don't move them," Hannibal orders, voice hoarse as a result of the violent intrusion.

"My therapy hour, I do what I want," Will sneers in response.

"You should have some faith in your psychiatrist."

Hannibal's eyes are now clear and bright, a stark contrast to the look in them before, and Will can now see how people are tricked into thinking this man is indeed a good Samaritan that wants to help them with their problems. A man that's definitely *not* a sadistic serial killer and cannibal.

In the meantime, Hannibal slides two fingers into his own mouth, coating them in spit, then that same hand creeps down to the parting between Will's asscheeks and rubs around the entrance. Will squirms at the sensation and his erection twitches in anticipation. Hannibal is unlawfully good at everything he does in bed — or in this case, against the ladder in his therapy room — and this is no exception. One finger plunges in, expertly locating the little sensitive spot, as if he knows Will's body better than Will knows it himself. The targeted and precise drag along his prostate draws a needy sound from Will.

"Hands on the ladder," Hannibal repeats.

And oh, what he's doing is so evil and so unfair, because he's gotten Will so worked-up and desperate that he knows Will is going to obey.

Will lets out a long sigh, curses under his breath and lifts his hands to grip the wooden step. He can't really be mad at himself for surrendering so easily, simply because of how sinfully good the surrender feels. Hannibal's mouth is back, bobbing up and down his length with a quickening pace, while his fingers slide in and out of Will in a matching rhythm.

He is so close, close to spilling down Hannibal's throat. And as soon as he's done, he's going to scoop up his clothes and leave, extracting himself from Hannibal's maddening influence that seduces his body and clouds his brain. Will intended today to be their last ever meeting, and he still plans on keeping it so.

His knuckles are clenching around the ladder so hard that it hurts, and his hips are still immobilised by the weight of Hannibal's hand. But it doesn't matter, because the man's mouth and fingers are moving *just right*, bringing Will closer to his climax with every movement.

Will is so lost in chasing the peak of his pleasure that the chiming of the antique clock in the office startles him. The round display indicates that it is 4 o'clock, but Will's arousal-filled mind is unable to quite understand the significance of it, until Hannibal pulls off and speaks.

"Your hour is up," he informs Will.

Hannibal retracts his fingers, and the sudden loss of the wonderful contact leaves Will feeling devastatingly empty. All he can do is groan loudly and blink in confusion.

"No," he states, staring at Hannibal with disbelief and rapidly-growing frustration.

"Yes, I'm afraid. I have another patient waiting."

Hannibal gets to his feet, straightening and dusting off his expensive suit pants. Will is overwhelmed by a profound impulse to tackle him to the ground and make him finish what he started. Because knowing Hannibal, there is no other patient, and he is lying to Will just because he loves toying with him like that.

However, at that moment, Will hears the front door of the building open and someone step into the waiting room. Hannibal has already made his way to the door of his office, swiftly unlocking it with a loud click.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Will mumbles bitterly, frantically fumbling to pull up his jeans.

When the door slowly opens, he's barely managed to get fully dressed. Will keeps the gun behind his back and shoves it into the waistband, where it can be hidden by his untucked shirt. He barges past Hannibal on his way out, making sure to harshly bump their shoulders as he goes. His neglected arousal is straining through the fabric of his pants and leaving an uncomfortable stain. Though, the dire sensation comes second to the raw anger boiling inside him.

This is un-fucking-believable.

Will waits. It takes hours, but they say patience makes the reward sweeter. Finally, the last patient for the day leaves Hannibal's office, and soon after that Hannibal emerges, locking the front door of the building behind him.

A small grin spreads onto Will's face as he watches the man get into his stupidly pretentious black Bentley. The grin grows wider as the car fails to start, despite Hannibal's repeated attempts to turn the key in the ignition. The wonderful thing about this particular model of Bentley is that the car's hood is relatively easy to pop open without a key, which allowed Will to remove the cable that connects the engine to the battery, thereby immobilising the car.

Will can see the confusion and irritation written on Hannibal's face as he climbs out of the vehicle to see what the problem is. That's when Will steps out of the shadows.

"Stranded, doctor?" he asks in a mock-pitying voice, letting Hannibal see his shit-eating smirk, "what a shame."

Hannibal lifts his face from where he's looking under the hood of the car to find the source of malfunction.

"If only someone hadn't removed your battery cable," Will continues, closing the distance between them. "Karma is a bitch."

Hannibal straightens up and looks him in the eye, his gaze cold and shiver-inducing. It must be the same look he'd give his soon-to-be murder victim that just attempted to escape or acted otherwise difficult. But Will isn't scared.

"So are you, it seems," Hannibal points out icily.

"Only if you provoke me. Now, finish what you started in the room, and I'll let you leave."

"It's hardly my fault that you chose to engage me in a long conversation instead of getting right down to the business, thereby leaving us insufficient time to finish our escapade," Hannibal counters without missing a beat.

Will wants to punch him. But first things first.

"Get in the car," he grits out and pulls the car door open with a forceful movement.

"Or what?" Hannibal questions mildly, "you actually shoot me this time?"

"Wouldn't you like to find out?"

Hannibal gives him an unamused glance, but obeys nonetheless and tucks himself into the back seat through the door Will is holding open. Will follows immediately, roughly squeezing into the same small space.

“If we really are to do this, I suggest we return to the office. It will be far more comfor—”

Hannibal’s offer is interrupted as he is abruptly shoved backwards across the seats, with Will pouncing on top of him, their chests pressing together.

“Just fuck me already,” Will growls, hastily pulling Hannibal’s coat off him, probably ripping the luxurious material in the process. Not that he cares.

He is aware that he sounds desperate, openly displaying his need for Hannibal’s body like that. But that’s another thing he doesn’t care about. Will wants it, and he’s practically been *promised* it, so he is going to take it.

He unbuttons Hannibal’s suit jacket, vest, and dress shirt, so impatient to bite and scratch the man’s bare chest that he doesn’t bother fully removing the clothes. Before he can get to Hannibal’s pants, Hannibal flips them around so that Will is now lying across the back seat of the Bentley.

All of Will’s clothes end up on the floor of the car soon enough. Thankfully, he isn’t wearing as many layers as Hannibal, which is far more practical in situations such as this one. The previous efforts of Hannibal’s fingers left Will feeling open and eager for more, so he throws his calves on Hannibal’s shoulders, articulating his growing need with a litany of words that sound like something along the lines of *rightnowimmediately*.

Hannibal doesn’t waste any more time being difficult or witty, and Will hears him quickly ready himself, briefly wondering if the man always keeps lube and condoms in his car specifically for situations like this. Then Hannibal pushes inside with one long and smooth motion, anchoring himself with one hand on Will’s hip and another spread across his chest. Will swears as he exhales shakily, letting his hips roll to meet Hannibal’s thrusts.

The sensation is burning, the leather of the seat is sticking uncomfortably to his back, and his entire body is bent at awkward angles to fit into the cramped space, but despite all that, Will has no regrets. He asked for this, and as much as he hates to admit it, he *craved* this. He missed Hannibal, missed his dexterous hands and sharp teeth. He missed the way Hannibal can so effortlessly make him forget his usual cocky attitude in favour of becoming a sweaty and writhing mess.

Will is still furious at the man for all the ridiculous stunts he’s pulled, but evidently, his wrath doesn’t cancel out his profound desire. So, Will resigns and lets Hannibal pound into him with an unforgivable force and speed. Walking is going to hurt tomorrow, without a doubt.

Hannibal braces himself on his forearms on either side of Will’s head, which brings his mouth close enough to latch onto Will’s neck. The more his teeth bite into the soft flesh, the harder Will digs his nails into Hannibal’s back. Will wraps his arms around the man’s midriff, pulling their bodies closer together and his cock deeper inside Will.

Despite the almost freezing temperature of the night, it's hot inside the car, and the heat radiating from their naked bodies fogs up the windows. If Will was capable of any rational thoughts in the moment, he would be thankful for the condensation stopping anyone from seeing inside. But he doesn't think. He doesn't think about anything other than how Hannibal is filling him in all the right ways.

Will is gripping his back like a lifeline, sinking his nails into the skin, burying his ragged breaths and hoarse moans into Hannibal's shoulder. He lets his hands wander over the man's body, mapping out the remainders of the bruises he sustained during the violent confrontation Will prepared for him at the opera — the bruises Will inflicted, although not by his own hands. He presses into the dark spots on the skin, eliciting a groan of pained pleasure from Hannibal every time. Will guesses that maybe the man enjoyed the reciprocal act of sending proxies to kill each other. Maybe he enjoyed the thrill of fighting for his life, and saw it as some obscure courting ritual.

And maybe Will relishes in that thrill of mutual destruction too, if he's completely honest with himself.

What they have is definitely unconventional, unhealthy, and outright dangerous. But it's also *good*, and that is all Will cares about. And it gets *even better* when Hannibal wraps his hand around Will's cock that's once again close to its climax, pumping it in time with the movement of his hips. Will's jaws find the nearest piece of skin to clamp onto, which happens to be just above Hannibal's clavicle, and he bites down as he coats Hannibal's hand and their stomachs with his release.

Through the haze clouding his brain, Will hears Hannibal hiss at the bite and continue thrusting into him even harder. The force of it jostles Will's entire body; he is sure he's going to have chafe marks on his back and ass, and his sensitive nerve endings almost become overloaded with pain. Then, Hannibal's hips stutter and Will feels a hot spill erupting from his pulsing cock.

Hannibal pulls out and rests his forehead on Will's shoulder, both of them panting heavily. Just like the first time they did this, on the chaise longue in Hannibal's living room. Will cranes his head up and closes his eyes. This is not how he envisioned this afternoon going, not in the slightest. This means they are back to square one; the mutual hostility remains unresolved, and to make matters worse, it's complicated by their seemingly irrepressible attraction to each other.

Will's inner conflict is interrupted by the warm sensation across his abdomen. He looks down to find Hannibal sliding his tongue along Will's stomach, carefully lapping up every drop of his cum. *Wouldn't want to ruin the interior of his precious car*, Will thinks with a snort. He appreciates the clean-up, though. Besides, Hannibal's nimble tongue feels kind of nice as it folds into the hollow of his navel, and the way Hannibal's dark eyes look from that angle, glancing up at Will from underneath his lashes, produce another weak but nonetheless arousing tug in Will's gut.

"You can have your missing cable back now," Will offers, for lack of a better thing to say in the moment.

“I take that as an indication that my efforts have been deemed above satisfactory.”

“You know they are,” Will replies, surprised at how fond he sounds. He blames the post-sex bliss for it. “If you weren’t a good fuck, I would’ve left us as a one-night stand.”

This is the most warmth he’s going to allow in his interactions with Hannibal, as he is still unsure of his feelings towards the man. All the positive and exciting emotions related to their arrangement of casual sex are not to be confused with real affection.

“Likewise,” Hannibal murmurs, “I recommend that Adam Towers books a follow-up appointment with me some time soon.”

“We’ll see about that,” Will tells him with a slight smile lingering on his lips. “I’ll call you if he needs further therapy.”

He hasn’t yet decided what to make of his conflicting feelings and thoughts about Hannibal, but one thing he *can* do is ensure that whatever happens next, happens on his terms. *He* will call Hannibal if he needs anything, not the other way around. And if Hannibal tries to contact him, Will is going to do what he does best; ignore it, just like he ignores everyone else’s attempts at making him socialize. And what’s the worst Hannibal could do if Will didn’t respond to his calls or messages? He’s already survived Cordell’s attack and the rose petal invasion - whatever might come next couldn’t be that bad.

Will is only partially aware of redressing and parting from Hannibal, too wrapped up in his internal dilemma about the man. He thinks about it the entire one-hour drive home.

It makes no sense that after all the nightmarish things Hannibal has put him through, Will somehow feels drawn *towards* him, not away from him. Well, it does make sense, but Will doesn’t exactly want to face the implications of that conclusion. He doesn’t have - can’t have - feelings for a serial killer, no one in their right mind would. Will tries to tell himself that he just likes the sex, but if that was the case, he wouldn’t care about the fact that they’ve never kissed, or feel a pang of disappointment every time Hannibal doesn’t ask to stay in bed after they’ve fucked.

No, Will refuses to label his feelings as anything romantic. They’re so far from romance, with their violent games. At the same time, though, Will does feel something. Something more than just simple physical attraction. A sentiment more profound than just the convenience of satisfying his need to get laid. A longing for companionship, after having met another like himself; someone whose soul is stained with the blood of others, just like Will’s soul.

With a heavy sigh, Will realises that tonight’s events have left him thoroughly *fucked*, in more than one sense of the word.

Chapter End Notes

To all of my fellow bottom Will lovers, you're welcome!

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

He doesn't know how he makes it out of the river, but he staggers across wild grass and collapses as soon as he reaches the thick trees lining the riverbank. He tries to stand, only to immediately fall back down as his injured ankle can't bear the weight of his body anymore.

The whole world tilts and blackens around the edges, and Will doesn't have any strength left in his muscles to reattempt getting up. All his energy has been taken up by swimming to the shore, and the overpowering exhaustion kicks in now that he's not battling the waves anymore.

Will closes his eyes for what he intends to be a blink, but his eyelids are too heavy to reopen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will doesn't contact Hannibal for the next couple of weeks. Neither does Hannibal try to contact Will. Will almost starts to believe that this is the end of their peculiar relationship, when Hannibal's number lights up his phone screen one afternoon.

The man tells Will about an elite and luxurious wine tasting ceremony he has been invited to, and asks if Will would be interested in accompanying him. Will politely declines, making an excuse that he already has plans for the night. Going to the opera gave him enough of a glimpse into the high society Hannibal surrounds himself with, and such circles have left a sour taste in Will's mouth. A slick, coppery taste of blood.

There was too much bloodshed that evening, and although it was necessary that one time, it is not something Will wants to be part of again. He's perfectly content taking out his targets from a mile away, never coming face to face with them or having to smell the fresh blood. It's no surprise that he's come to associate aristocratic societies with Hannibal, and consequently with gruesome violence. So, when Will declines the invitation, it's more for the comfort of his own mind than anything else.

Hannibal doesn't call him again after that. Some days, when it's cold outside and Will succumbs to the craving of a warm body pressed against him, his hand itches to grab the phone and dial the familiar number. Then he thinks better of it and heads to the nearest bar, picking up the first man or woman that looks his way. Will is painfully aware that it's not the same as Hannibal, but it's not necessarily better or worse. Just different. And he can get used to this kind of different, if he puts his mind to it.

Next time he hears from Hannibal is another week later. The correspondence is eccentric and almost vague enough to be interpreted as benign, if Will was ignorant enough. But he isn't. The text message sends a chill down his spine, and it's not a pleasant one.

Hello, Will. Today had me thinking of an old nursery rhyme:

"To market, to market, to buy a fat pig. Home again, home again, jiggy-jig."

- Hannibal

Will immediately knows what it means. The pig imagery evokes the face of a man in his mind, clear as day. Mason Verger.

It was only a matter of time before Verger tried to send another of his underlings to get rid of Will, motivated by the false notion that Will intends to kill him and further enraged by the fact that Will butchered his right-hand man. He knew Verger's revenge must be coming, but he was so preoccupied with managing his contract deadlines and playing wicked games with Hannibal that he didn't give the piggish man much thought. In retrospect, he probably should have.

Will sets his phone down with a sigh and pours himself another whiskey. The distant possibility of having to fight off another of Verger's henchmen has now become imminent reality. Otherwise, Will deduces, Hannibal wouldn't have warned him.

He lives with a pack of vigilant and protective dogs, and there are enough firearms and sharp objects in the house that he always has one within reach. Thus, Will figures out that there is no place safer than his own home. Not that he has anywhere else to run to, anyway.

Well, there is one other place in the world where Will feels welcome. And Will knows for a fact that the man living there can handle, and even enjoy, a little blood-spilling activity. But there is absolutely no way, *absolutely no way in hell* Will is going to go to Hannibal for help. He managed to subdue Cordell on his own, so he can take whatever is coming for him next, too. He doesn't need help, especially not from Hannibal, since the man was the one who caused the whole shitshow in the first place.

Will is going to be just fine. Maybe he'd be scared if he had someone to be scared for. But he has no partner, close friends, or any family members he still talks to. With his hunting rifle, enough liquid courage, and all those years working as a cop, there is nothing stopping Will from continuing to live his life as normal, without fear.

The top-brand fishing rod he bought performs well when he fishes in a stream, but he is yet to test it in deeper waters. Will takes his boat out to the nearby river, intending to make a day trip out of it. He packs sandwiches and a thermos full of coffee — Irish, for the extra warmth for his insides and a pleasant haze for his head — and brings Winston to keep him company. Winston is the only one of his canine friends that Will trusts to sit still in the boat, or be able to swim to the shore if anything was to go wrong on the trip.

The wind is cool and crisp, creating waves on the surface of the navy water. Winston doesn't seem to feel the cold, barking happily and rolling around in the sand before Will manages to

get the boat out into the water. Dark clouds slowly gather overhead, promising rain, but it doesn't bother Will. Many people say that fishing is better during light showers, anyway.

Just as Will stops the engine to plant the boat into the middle of the river, the first drops start cascading down from the clouds, soon coating everything with a thin grey veil of falling water. Winston is excited by the rain and whirls around trying to catch raindrops into his mouth, which pulls a small burst of laughter from Will. A few minutes later, Will obtains the first catch for the day. It's shaping up to be a perfect day outdoors, with just the loyal dog and tranquil nature keeping Will company.

The looming threat under the name Mason Verger is still lingering at the back of his mind, but Will tries not to let it worry him too much. If anything comes, he will deal with it there and then. Giving in to unnecessary paranoia and anxious anticipation isn't helpful. Maybe Hannibal is wrong and Verger gave up. Maybe the fact that Cordell never returned from his murder mission made Will look a lot more dangerous and invincible than expected, and the king of the meat dynasty simply decided not to waste any more manpower to bring him down. That would be an ideal outcome; sending out a message that Will Graham isn't to be messed with.

However, something tells Will that the likelihood of Hannibal being wrong about this is low. He's simply not the kind of man to be irrational or fearful in matters like this. He has to be sure something is going to happen, since he chose to warn Will.

Nobody has come to Will's house since Cordell. They probably decided that stepping foot onto Will's property was precisely what caused the poor man's demise, as if the innocent farmhouse exterior is hiding a some kind of a monstrous murder mansion inside. Consequently, it means that Verger's goons are likely waiting for Will to venture out of his safe haven before striking.

Suddenly, the peaceful woods surrounding the river gain a sinister aura. He shouldn't have come fishing here, alone and exposed in the middle of a wide expanse of water.

Will takes a few large gulps of his whiskey-infused coffee, shaking the paranoid thoughts away. No one would be able to even find him here, thanks to the curtain of rain obscuring visibility and helping his boat blend into the greenish-grey scenery. There is nothing to worry about.

He casts his line back into the dark blue depths, letting his eyes wander across the woods lining the riverbank. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see movement; tree branches shaking ominously as if trying to conceal danger lurking amongst them. It could simply be a wild animal, perhaps a wolf or a bear.

Or it could be a whole different kind of predator.

Will doesn't get to ponder it any further, as a sharp, deafening sound startles him, echoing in the otherwise quiet space. He knows a gunshot when he hears one.

So, before he's even aware of it, he is lunging down headfirst, out of view. As he tries to surge down as fast as he can and lie flat against the bottom of the boat, he trips over the

fishing road he dropped in the process, landing on his foot the wrong way. There is a faint popping sound as his ankle twists uncomfortably, but Will disregards the painful sensation in favour of lying completely still on his front and trying to keep his head clear, despite his heart rate skyrocketing and the rush of blood humming in his ears.

They're onto him. And he's defenseless, trapped in the middle of a river.

Although the increasing throbbing of his leg and the panic response in his entire body are making it extremely difficult, Will tries to think. If he switched the boat engine back on and tried to flee, the shooter would be able to follow him easily. And there would be more than one of them hiding in the woods; Will doubts any man would be sent on this mission alone, after what happened to Cordell.

No, the only option is to plunge into the ice-cold depths of the river and take his chances of swimming to the shore. The rain wouldn't stop the colossal boat from being visible, but it may just be able to obscure Will's head peeking above the surface enough that his attackers lose track of him. It's not an ideal choice, but it's the most practical. And Will doesn't have infinite time to weigh the pros and cons of his decision. So, he takes a deep breath, braces himself, and swings over the edge of the boat into the freezing water.

The current instantly sweeps him away from the vessel, a strong underwater pull overpowering his limbs that have been momentarily rendered immobile due to the cold. The sudden drop in temperature jolts Will out of it soon enough, and the next thing he knows is that he is frantically splashing and kicking towards — what he hopes to be — the direction of the nearest shore.

Will is a confident swimmer, having spent his childhood on the boat yards with his dad. However, the large body of water is already disorienting, and the rain drizzling into his face is making it even harder to find his bearings. It wouldn't be such a demanding quest if he had the luxury of keeping his head above the surface. But doing that makes him a target, so he only pulls up for a quick breath and a glance at his surroundings, before submerging his head below the waves again.

He doesn't know how he makes it out of the river, but he staggers across wild grass and collapses as soon as he reaches the thick trees lining the riverbank. It's only then that Will realises.

Winston.

Will knows his beloved pet can swim. But was the dog able to follow him off the boat, or is he still on board, trapped and confused about why his owner disappeared so unexpectedly? Will tries to stand, only to immediately fall back down as his injured ankle can't bear the weight of his body anymore.

The whole world tilts and blackens around the edges, and Will doesn't have any strength left in his muscles to reattempt getting up. All his energy has been taken up by swimming to the shore, and the overpowering exhaustion kicks in now that he's not battling the waves anymore.

Will closes his eyes for what he intends to be a blink, but his eyelids are too heavy to reopen.

He regains consciousness, wet and cold clothes clinging to his body and making him shiver profoundly. The sun has set, and the woods have been enveloped by darkness. If it wasn't for the sparks of agony shooting up his leg, Will could've thought it was all one big, hellish nightmare.

His phone is completely useless after ending up drenched in water, so he has to find his own way out of the forest. Walking on his busted ankle hurts like hell, but Will doesn't have a choice. He uses a thick wooden branch as a cane to help move his injured foot, and follows the riverbank to the closest road. He looks and calls for Winston as he trudges through the overgrown grass, but the dog is nowhere to be seen.

Will knows that his dear pet is resourceful and can navigate back home even from far away, but his stomach is still sick with worry. At the same time, he knows that there is no use trying to find Winston now, when he can barely walk himself.

Hitchhiking back to Wolf Trap proves to be easier than he thought, most likely due to the fact that he's limping, soaked to the bone, and looks utterly miserable. Will makes it to his house eventually, gritting his teeth together the entire time to stop himself from screaming due to pain and exhaustion. Walking for a couple of miles had a disastrous effect on his ankle, causing it to swell colossally, but he doesn't even think about going to the hospital.

Once home, Will wraps a bag of frozen potato wedges from the freezer around his foot — the best substitute for an ice pack that he has — and changes into dry clothes. The other dogs notice Winston's absence, but settle around Will nonetheless to keep him warm. The soothing sensation of soft sheets and the fluffy masses of fur around him is the last thing Will knows before passing out.

It's still dark when Will awakens again, and it's to the sounds of familiar barking. He thinks he must be dreaming at first, his guilt-stricken conscience conjuring up images of his lost dog to torture him further. However, the loud woofing persists, and Will is filled with a growing spark of hope that Winston found his way back home.

Just as Will is about to unlock the front door, he hesitates. A thought crosses his paranoia-infused mind, of Verger's men having found Winston and using him to lure Will out. The rest of the pack crowd around the entrance, behaving like there are indeed visitors on the

property. The dogs' yapping doesn't sound alarmed, but Will isn't so easily convinced. He grabs the hunting rifle, just in case, and aims it at the door before swinging it open.

A bundle of gold and brick-red fur immediately swooshes in and Will lets out a sigh of relief, seeing that Winston appears unharmed. However, a shadow falls across him as a tall figure steps into the doorway, and Will instinctively jerks up his weapon, pointing it at the man's chest.

"Will."

Will drops the rifle with a clatter at the sight in front of him.

Hannibal's appearance is so far from his usual meticulously put-together look that Will's sleepy brain almost fails to recognise him at first. His hair is dishevelled, ash-blond strands falling on his forehead, and there are remnants of poorly-wiped dirt on his face. His suit is in a disarray, but somehow still clean. Will figures he must have worn a plastic covering over it, the same one that Will saw him wear that night at the docks.

When Hannibal uttered Will's name, his voice cracked mid-syllable, and now he is drawing ragged breaths, mouth slightly parted. And the look in his wide eyes is... Will doesn't even know what to call it. It's the look of a man dying of thirst in the desert, who's been offered a sip of water. It's the look of a man on the death row, who has been pardoned at the last minute.

The look of a man who thought he had lost what he valued most in life, and miraculously got it back.

Will pinches his eyes shut, the wave of inexplicably strong emotions radiating from Hannibal's gaze too much to handle. He shields his eyes with his forearm, as if blinded by sudden bright sunlight. Even with his curse of oversensitive empathy, Will has never been able to get a proper read of Hannibal's emotions, apart from the ones he deliberately presented on the surface. It feels as if he's only ever seen Hannibal in a dark room where all windows are covered with heavy curtains. And now, for a fleeting moment, those curtains swayed enough to let a tiny ray of sun in, briefly illuminating the interior of Hannibal's mind and allowing Will to see it properly.

And what Will sees shakes him to the core.

He blinks, and just like that, the curtains have been pulled tight and the darkness is back. Hannibal clears his throat and casts his eyes down to Will's feet, one of them held in the air and visibly more bruised and swollen than the other.

"May I look at that?" he asks.

His voice is back to the usual timbre, detached and clinical. But after seeing things in the light, albeit for a brief second, Will now knows there are wealths of sentiment under the facade of detachment.

“No, it’s fine,” he dismisses straight away, carefully setting his injured foot on the floor, as if to add legitimacy to his words.

Hannibal purses his lips disapprovingly, then opens his mouth, ready to voice an objection. Will cuts him off by speaking first.

“What are you doing here?” he queries, “just happened to be doing your murder and cannibalism business in the neighbourhood and came across my lost dog?”

“You could say so.”

Will snorts out a sharp, sardonic laugh. “You came here to kill Verger’s men after they took care of me. Tying up the loose ends, huh?”

“My intention wasn’t to get you killed, but to prevent it,” Hannibal counters.

“I don’t need your back-up. I managed them all on my own.”

Will isn’t so sure that barely escaping a rain of bullets, running for his life like a coward, and stupidly injuring his foot and abandoning his dog in the process counts as “managing” his enemies, but Hannibal doesn’t need to know those minor technicalities.

Hannibal regards him for a moment, eyes burning into Will’s. In them, he sees both extremes of one spectrum; fondness and exasperation.

“What, you suddenly feeling guilty?” Will adds sharply, unable to keep bitterness out of his voice.

Hannibal is still looking at him, the intense stare of his honey whiskey-coloured eyes unwavering. For someone who is so skilled at always appearing reserved and enigmatic, roaring waves of emotion are threatening to spill out from behind those blond eyelashes. Will knows that emotion has a name, but he didn’t think it’s something that could exist for them. *Between* them.

“Did you think I’m incapable of feeling guilt?” Hannibal asks.

Will suddenly can’t find another witty comeback to strike back with.

“Thanks for bringing Winston back,” he says instead.

“It’s no problem.”

Hannibal shifts his weight, and it seems that he’s about to say something else. Then, he thinks better of it. Will hasn’t moved from the doorway to invite him in, so he must realise that his company is unwelcome at the given moment.

Will is so ready to go back to resting, but when Hannibal decides to speak again, it isn’t to announce his departure.

“May I use your mirror?”

Will blinks at him, confused.

“Better if you don’t, you look like shit. Your neat-freak self would faint at the sight,” he sneers.

Hannibal pays no mind to his teasing. He doesn’t even give Will a disapproving look to show how ill-timed his distasteful humour is.

“It’s to suture a wound on my backside, as I can’t see behind me. But I understand if you would rather I leave now,” Hannibal explains.

Will blinks at him again, mouth agape in sudden realisation.

“Oh. You’re injured,” he stammers.

That would explain Hannibal’s uncharacteristically disordered appearance. He must have come face to face with the men that attempted to shoot Will. Will hopes that was the last encounter of their lives.

“Just a laceration to my triceps brachii. Nothing major, it can wait until I get home.”

“Get over here,” Will orders before Hannibal gets to finish his sentence. He steps out of the doorway, practically pulling the older man inside.

Hannibal steadies himself, visibly stunned by Will’s sudden change in demeanour.

“Have you stitched a wound before?” he enquires, not without a little hint of skepticism.

“No. But I have steady as fuck hands.”

He doesn’t specify whether it’s due to all the liquor he drinks, or the nature of his job, but Hannibal acquiesces nonetheless.

“Allow me to retrieve the medical kit from my car, then,” he says, heading back outside.

Will nods. He’s never been interested enough in self-preservation to have a first aid kit at his house, always making do with supermarket-brand painkillers and some bandaids instead. He hobbles into the kitchen to find a bottle of something strong to numb the pain in his ankle, as well as his head. More so than the pain, he desperately needs to drown out the strange little spark of protective instinct that ignited in his chest at the sight of Hannibal on his doorstep in a bleeding and rumpled state.

Hannibal returns a moment later, carrying a sizable bag with a red cross on it. Of course a man with hobbies like Hannibal’s would have an elaborate array of medical supplies stashed in his car. Will takes a swig from the bottle of scotch he’s holding and leads the way to the bathroom.

“Sit,” he instructs, setting the lid of the toilet down.

Hannibal obeys and starts pulling off his three-piece suit. Despite his ever-present aura of elegance, his trembling fingers fumble with the buttons. Will pries his hands away, positioning them around the neck of the scotch bottle instead.

His own hands aren't very steady either, contrary to his earlier claim. Nevertheless, Will manages to peel off the bloodstained layers of clothing from Hannibal's upper body. The still-bleeding gash on the back of the man's arm extends from his shoulder to almost his elbow. It looks like someone got him good with a blade.

If Will is honest with himself, he has absolutely no idea how to tend to a laceration of that size, but he doesn't want to leave Hannibal to his own devices either. Especially not when the man showed up at his house and asked for help — albeit disguised as a request to borrow a mirror, undoubtedly to save his large ego.

Thankfully, Hannibal possesses the coherence to explain the intricacies of the necessary medical intervention to Will, and lacks the arrogance to look down on him for not already knowing these skills. Under the doctor's expert instruction, Will disinfects, stitches, and bandages the cut. The quality of his work probably isn't stellar, given how exhausted and sore he is from his impromptu plunge into the river and the trek out of the forest, but it's better than if Hannibal had to do it himself using a mirror, so the man has no right to complain.

And Hannibal doesn't. He thanks Will for his effort, and asks once more to take a look at his sprained ankle. Will doesn't protest this time, and stretches out on his bed, which is situated in the corner of his living room downstairs. The expansive medical kit happens to have compression bandages and a proper ice pack, which Hannibal secures around the sprain. The throbbing is noticeably subsiding after the treatment, and for the first time in god knows how many hours, Will feels like he can relax and breathe.

"You need to keep this elevated," Hannibal hums, reaching behind Will's head in search of something to place under the injured foot.

"Thank you, Hannibal," Will says just as the man leans over him to grab hold of a pillow.

Hannibal glances down at him, and suddenly their faces are extremely close, and the oxygen in the air has turned into molecules of tenderness. Will inhales instinctively, letting them slip past his parted mouth and fill his insides. It feels like he's floating, as if the gravitational pull has been replaced by a pull of something stronger, an overpowering need to feel the press of lips against lips.

It seems that Hannibal can feel it too, as he pauses his movements, lingering above Will for what feels like an eternity, and for no discernible reason, *other than to gaze longingly at Will's eyes and mouth*. The gravity of attraction becomes almost overbearing, and Will feels every atom in his body slowly surrendering to being pulled into Hannibal's orbit. It's as if his body has been injected with oxytocin, and the endless cosmos of desire is threatening to sweep him off his feet and swallow him whole, unless —

"Ew. You smell like viscera," Will deadpans.

And just like that, the illusion of weightlessness is broken, and he feels gravity settle into his bones again and firmly ground him, yanking him out of the delusional sickly-sweet fairytale into reality. The reality that he knows is grim, but also knows is safe and stable.

“I can’t say your scent is pleasant, either,” Hannibal tells him bluntly.

His composure is back quickly, as if the fleeting rose-coloured moment between them was nothing but a product of Will’s affection-deprived mind. However, the feeling was there and it was mutual, there is no doubt in Will’s mind about it.

“Well, that’s exactly why I’m going to go take a shower,” he replies, determinedly getting back on his feet. Or one foot, to be accurate.

Hannibal may be the sky and the stars, all the stunning constellations and undiscovered galaxies, but Will prefers to have his feet firmly on the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Can't believe i used the jiggity jig line in a fic hahaha. There's a first time for everything, i suppose ͡_('ʘ)_/

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Emotionally entangled. It's the most accurate term Will can think of to describe the recently transpired events. Sex doesn't equal feelings, and by that logic, neither does kissing. Thus, it would seem that he's safe from any kind of romantic attachment, but he feels far from being safe. Instead, Will feels vulnerable and exposed, but not necessarily in a bad way.

Chapter Notes

The long awaited kiss is here! But does it go smoothly?

Nothing ever does with these two smitten idiots.

Will showers as well as he can on one foot, keeping his bandaged ankle out of the stream of water. The droplets cascading onto his skin wake him up, but at the same time, the hot and relaxing steam makes him want to fall asleep. It's a conflicting feeling, but then again, everything during this eventful day has been conflicting, from his unfortunate injury to Hannibal knocking on his door.

Will has been caught between the two extremes of dismissing and accepting Hannibal's help, sporadically bouncing from one to another. He doesn't want to appear weak or disadvantaged under any circumstance, and since his sprained ankle is preventing him from being able to walk properly, clinging to his self-sufficient attitude as hard as he can is all he can do. At the same time, though, the cold compression Hannibal expertly applied to his foot relieved the pain, and Will finds himself grateful.

Why are all his thoughts and feelings about Hannibal so contradictory?

The sight of him wounded ignites something passionate inside Will, but he can't quite determine if it's a craving to nurture and protect the man, or gloat at the fact that Hannibal finally got what was coming for him; paying with his own blood for sending Mason Verger after Will.

He assumes — no, *knows* — that Hannibal slayed all the men that tried to kill him. He would have no other plausible reason to come hunting in Wolf Trap. Everything that happened at the river is still a blur in Will's mind. It was afternoon when he ventured out fishing, and it was

light outside. But he remembers it being completely dark when he awoke, sprawled on the ground by the water.

He must've been out cold for hours. *Jesus*.

Will doesn't doubt that Verger's henchmen looked for him everywhere after losing sight of him when he dove off the boat. Maybe he should thank the thick overgrown grass on the riverbank for hiding his unconscious body from view. He must've been so well concealed that even Winston couldn't find him with his hypersensitive sense of smell.

Will feels a pang of guilt, realising that his beloved Winston must've been distraught after losing his owner. He can only imagine his dog's plight, having to swim to the shore and frantically try to find his human in the woods under the pouring rain. The spot along the river where Will trudged out of the water could've been miles apart from Winston. He makes a mental note to give his dear pet an extra generous amount of pats and snuggles, to reassure him that Will is never going to abandon him like that again.

It's pure good luck that Hannibal happened to come across Winston and was able to take him home.

Or was it? Will's train of thought comes to an abrupt stop with screeching brakes, and shifts its gears into reverse. He thinks back to the point where he realised he'd been passed out for hours. Hannibal and Winston didn't return to the house until after Will had made it back, which can only mean they stayed out in the woods the entire time. And there is only one reason they would do that.

They spent hours searching for Will.

Several excruciatingly long hours, not knowing if they'd ever find him. Not knowing if Verger's men found him first. Not knowing if he was still breathing. And for the duration of those several excruciatingly long hours, Hannibal didn't give up. He could've deemed Will not worth saving, and moved on with his life. He could've not cared. But he did.

And that's when Will realises the full gravity of the look in Hannibal's eyes, when he opened the door. It was the look of pure and utmost relief; the look of a man who has regained what he thought he had lost. *Whom* he thought he had lost.

Will feels a hot flush course through his body, warming up his aching muscles, even though he'd turned the shower off minutes ago and the air in the small bathroom had started cooling down. He pulls on his clothes and hurries out, determined to do what he needs to do before the pleasant warm sensation dies out. It feels akin to the confidence and courage he gets from drinking, but this time it's much better. More natural. More satisfying, filling his bones with a soothing sense of reverence.

Will finds Hannibal in the lounge room petting the dogs, and pulls him on his feet.

"Thank you for not giving up on me," Will stammers, sounding out of breath as if he'd just ran a marathon.

The realisation about Hannibal's motives, and the subsequent fondness that came from it, should be propelling Will forward into action, to express his gratitude with something more than just words. He knows what he needs to do, but his stubborn feet feel frozen in place. Will is aware that he is rapidly losing his earlier momentum, and that he's acutely falling short of the peak he was aching to reach.

Hannibal regards him without saying a word, eyeing him with slight amusement. He must know what Will wants — he has to. And that means Hannibal must also know that Will failed, held back by whatever constraints he's harbouring in his soul. Will waits for the inevitable mocking smirk or a witty comment.

Those golden-brown eyes decide to show him mercy, however, and just as Will's mouth opens in an inaudible intake of breath, Hannibal presses their lips together.

It's gone as soon as it began, passing by faster than an eyeblink.

"My compassion for you is inconvenient at times."

The way he says it sounds casual, as if he's telling Will something simple; when in fact, it's anything but. Will blinks in a state of stunned idle, like a lagging video game, registering Hannibal's actions and then his words, with a five-second delay.

"Do you mind if I use your shower?" Hannibal continues.

Will's mouth operates on autopilot while his brain collects its bearings. "Go for it."

Hannibal glides past him, already with a change of clothes that he must've retrieved from his car. The sound of the bathroom door slowly shutting breaks Will out of the trance. He follows Hannibal with several long strides, ignoring the pain sparking up his leg from the sudden strain, and grabs the door handle before the other man has the chance to lock it.

Some unnamed instinct inside Will repels the possibility of being shut away from Hannibal, fighting against it with all its strength. It's just a shower, not like they're parting for life. Yet, in that moment, that instinct can't even bear having a thin wall separating them.

Will swings the door open and barges in, backing Hannibal against the wall of the bathroom. With the velocity of the movement still behind him, he crashes their mouths together. There is no intention to go backwards this time, or even to slow down. His chapped lips claim Hannibal's equally dry ones, and his teeth clamp onto the soft flesh of the other man's mouth.

It tastes like blood and sweat and exhaustion, but Will is too wrapped up in his determination that he doesn't care. He pulls back slower than he delved into the kiss, reluctant to face the damage caused by their metaphorical collision. Hannibal looks slightly taken aback, but not in a negative way.

Before the man says anything, Will swiftly leaves the small room, exiting just as abruptly as he came in. He doesn't know what got into him, but he guesses it must be the physical exertion and sleepless night taking a toll on his brain and body.

He kissed Hannibal. Well, Hannibal kissed *him* first, but it was no more than a tiny peck, so fleeting that he could almost have imagined it. Maybe he did imagine it. In either case, it was him who kissed Hannibal, properly and without a doubt.

And it shouldn't even be a big deal.

It's utterly ludicrous that he's having more reservations regarding putting his lips on another man's mouth than putting his lips on that same man's cock. The latter is just sex, whereas the former... has the potential of becoming complicated. If Will lets it.

He's had no second thoughts about kissing men before. Because it'd been just kissing; a temporary fix to fill the void in his heart, just for a night. Like fixing a colossal hole in the wall with duct tape. It would hold for a short while, but it's in no way sustainable in the long term. But unlike duct tape, there is a certain solidity about Hannibal. He's like strong concrete, designed to settle around Will's crumbling walls and mend them. Something people would call a perfect match.

And something Will would call a fucking hindrance.

He sets his sights on the bottle of scotch he'd been intermittently drinking from over the course of the night. It would be interesting to see what would happen if he downed the entire thing; whether the past minute or two would be permanently erased from his memory. Will knows he'd be better off not remembering what it felt like to kiss those lips.

Then again, if he drinks himself into oblivion and forgets what happened between them, he's only going to want to experience it again, anew.

Will sighs and saunters to the kitchen. In the overhead cabinet he uses the least, on the topmost shelf, tucked into the farthest corner possible, lies a small packet. Compact enough to fit in his palm, the little case contains his stash for a bad day.

Normally, the definition of a bad day in Will's mind can be quite vague, but this time, there is no doubt that he is having one *hell of a* day. So, he doesn't feel like he's overreacting in the slightest when his fingers fish out a cigarette from the pack. When he steps outside through the back door and sits on the porch, Buster follows and curls up beside his owner's legs. Will scratches the dog behind the ear after lighting the smoke and taking a long, deep drag.

A smoking habit has never stuck to him, apart from an occasional indulgence when he's stressed out of his mind. It's probably better that way. Will exhales out a cloud of grey smoke, the cold night air against his lips contrasting with the warm and soothing sensation in his lungs. It's almost sunrise, and Will wonders how on earth he managed to almost get killed, fuck up his foot, and end up emotionally entangled with the man he has a just-sex-no-feelings arrangement with, all in one night.

Emotionally entangled. It's the most accurate term Will can think of to describe the recently transpired events. Sex doesn't equal feelings, and by that logic, neither does kissing. Thus, it would seem that he's safe from any kind of romantic attachment, but he feels far from being safe. Instead, Will feels vulnerable and exposed, but not necessarily in a bad way. It's like he's running headfirst into a battlefield and wearing his heart outside his armour, making it an

easy target. And he's doing it *voluntarily*, which is exactly what's terrifying him to the bone. His life has become an even bigger mess than it already was. And the nicotine in his bloodstream can only do so much to help.

"Do you know what a smoker's lungs look like, Will?"

Will is snapped out of his musings by Hannibal's question. His tone is ever-polite, but dripping with disapproval.

"I don't. Because I don't cut up bodies in my spare time," he shoots back satirically, but without any substantial malice.

"I should serve you a dish made out of a blackened, *poisoned* lung like that, so that you will see the damage you are doing to your body."

Will tilts his head up so he can face Hannibal, who has come to stand beside him. The cigarette doesn't leave his lips.

"Why do you care if I'm poisoning myself?"

"Because you are smarter than to jeopardize your health," Hannibal answers calmly.

He's quick like lightning, hand surging out to snatch the burning cancer stick out of Will's grasp. What he evidently failed to take into account is the strain on his wounded arm, and he winces as his movement falls short. In the meantime, Will retracts the cigarette out of reach, demonstratively scooting away from Hannibal as much as the narrow porch allows. It's obvious that the man isn't used to being injured and having his range of motion restricted, and Will finds it eternally amusing.

"Put it out, Will," Hannibal resorts to saying sternly.

Will puffs out a bundle of smoke from behind his grinning teeth.

"Make me."

Hannibal's eyes narrow in light of the posed challenge. "I will," he warns.

For a second, Will wonders if Hannibal is going to lunge at him and pry the treasured little nicotine dispenser out of his hands, whatever it takes. He hopes not, because he's really not in the mood for a physically demanding quest, even if it's a lighthearted tussle.

In retrospect, he shouldn't have baited the other man. He knows Hannibal by now, and being taken down by force is exactly the kind of retaliation he should expect. Will can't possibly get away, not with his busted ankle, so in the vivid depths of his imagination, he can already see how it all is going to play out. He'd be pinned down on his back, immobilised under Hannibal's heavy weight, while the man would smirk triumphantly, removing the cigarette from Will's hand and *crushing* it into pieces with his strong fist.

Like Will envisioned, Hannibal's next move punches the breath out of his lungs. Though, not quite in the way he pictured. Hannibal's lips latch onto his own, sliding against them with an

insistent conviction. Will instinctively opens his mouth, inviting Hannibal to further his advances. As they continue kissing, he finds himself puzzled as to why he hadn't done this earlier.

Because fuck, the man is a good kisser. He catches Will's bottom lip between his teeth, bites down lightly enough that it feels like a tease, then slips his tongue into Will's mouth and slides it along his incisors. The burning stick in Will's hand is long forgotten. Hannibal's plan becomes clear as day in that moment. And it's genius in its simplicity; Will can't smoke if his mouth is preoccupied.

Hannibal is straddling him, parted legs resting on either side of Will's thighs. His hand is in Will's hair, fingers tangled into the shower-damp curls, softly rubbing his scalp as he guides Will's head into yet another kiss. It would be good, wonderful even, if his ass wasn't freezing from being pressed flush against the cold concrete of the porch.

"Inside. 'M fucking freezing," Will commands, but the words end up muffled because Hannibal is refusing to let his mouth go.

It seems that they move in unison, Will being pulled up by the other man's arms, and they somehow find their way back into the house, still entangled, leaving the icy wind behind. Will tries to utter another direction, to get on the bed, but Hannibal is a step ahead, already steering them in that direction. He falls on his back amidst the sheets and pillows, with Hannibal on top.

Will imagined he'd make a steaming cup of coffee after finishing his smoke, hoping it would warm him up, but being pressed against Hannibal's semi-dressed body does the job just fine. He shivers when large hands slide under his shirt to run over his midriff, realising that the other man is on the same page about turning up the heat, so to speak.

"Why'd you even bother getting dressed?" Will huffs, teasing his fingers on the waistband of Hannibal's pants. They're made of cream-coloured and smooth material and don't look fancy, but Will is sure the fabric is some luxurious cotton blend that you couldn't buy from a regular shop.

"Such an action is easy to undo, if you are so inclined." Hannibal's breath tickles his earlobe, the hot air feeling nice against his damp hair.

"Oh, I am."

Will tugs the expensive pants down, pulling off Hannibal's black briefs with them. With each article of clothing being removed, their movements grow faster and more purposeful. Will's shirt is the last to go, and once his upper body is exposed to the cool air of the room, Hannibal pauses. At first, Will thinks the man is admiring his naked state, enthralled eyes drinking in every inch of his skin. Something is certainly burning in Hannibal's eyes, but it's not the usual desire.

He stills, confused, and follows Hannibal's line of sight, ending at Will's bare chest. There's a faint mouth-shaped mark above his nipple, and several others along his collarbone. They're derisive proof that Will doesn't need Hannibal to have his companionship needs fulfilled. The

red love bites are there to remind them both that all this time, Hannibal was a choice made purely out of convenience. That any resemblance of commitment was — and still is — an illusion.

If there was even the tiniest chance that Hannibal had allowed himself to be fooled by that illusion, he certainly isn't anymore.

He looks at Will, and whatever desire was beginning to blossom in him is now replaced by growing indifference, cold like the chilling wind outside. He has no right to be jealous, but that doesn't mean he won't be, doesn't mean he won't treat Will sleeping with somebody else like an act of betrayal.

Will rolls his eyes. Betrayal implies that there was trust, or some other emotional attachment. And they have none.

"So, are you going fuck me or not?" Will taunts, pulling the other man into another kiss. More to hide his chest from view than for any other reason.

Hannibal pulls back almost as soon as their lips meet.

"You don't look like you're deprived of it," he points out dispassionately.

"Doesn't mean I don't want it," Will says, and it sounds more defensive than he intended. "Doesn't mean I don't want *you*."

Hannibal looks awfully unimpressed by Will's attempts to placate him.

"Is that so?" he questions. "Evidently, your other intimate partner leaves you satisfied enough."

Will sighs. He was lonely several nights ago and ended up bringing someone home after a trip to the nearest bar. Molly was a sweet girl, approachable and eager, with a fresh and gaping hole left in her heart by another man. They instantly clicked, but only the way a person desperate for company clicks with anyone offering it. He fucked her slow and gentle, even though it wasn't how he wanted it. Will figured it was what *she* would want. It quietened his craving for sexual gratification, sure, but did it satisfy his every need?

Will chooses not to answer that, not to himself and definitely not to Hannibal.

"I would hope they do, at least," Hannibal continues. And despite the polite exterior, his words sound so goddamn insincere; every syllable is laced with bitter sarcasm. Will hates it, but at the same time he can't blame Hannibal for feeling that way.

"It saves me from feeling guilty for having found a suitable alternative for myself," Hannibal adds.

Will's eyes narrow involuntarily at the mention of an *alternative*. Of course, with his logical brain, he knew there was always a possibility that he isn't the only person Hannibal has casual sex with. But that doesn't mean Will has ever consciously thought about it.

“Do you recall me inviting you to that wine tasting event? I met a man there, a poet. Good with his words, even better with his hands.”

Will glares in disbelief. The sheer audacity Hannibal has, lounging on Will bed, naked, proudly telling him about some other man he hooked up with.

“Truly a shame you declined the invitation. Antony mentioned that he wouldn’t have been opposed to *that kind of party*.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Will growls, interrupting Hannibal’s litany of praise about the stupid poet he doesn’t give a damn about.

At least he had the decency not to bring up what he did with Molly — the hickies just happened to be there, impossible to hide. Whereas Hannibal openly boasting about the men he’d slept with, while in bed with Will, is just outright rude. And Will isn’t going to put up with such blatant disrespect.

In a blink of an eye, he has pounced onto Hannibal and tackled him face first onto the bed. Hannibal doesn’t put up much of a fight, and a thought crosses Will’s mind that he purposefully brought up his other hook-up to awaken the territorial beast inside Will. If the man wants to run his mouth enough to end up being brutally fucked into the mattress, he’s going to get exactly what he bargained for.

And Will delivers. Spurred on by a mixture of anger and possessiveness, it doesn’t take long before he’s pounding into Hannibal, an animalistic grunt erupting from inside him with each forceful thrust. He never thought he’d be the jealous kind, especially since he’s vowed to stay away from all kinds of romantic endeavours, but the thought of someone else getting to see Hannibal like this makes something boil inside him and puts more power behind every sharp movement of his hips.

Holding himself up on one and a half legs is more difficult than Will had anticipated, so he presses his face between Hannibal’s shoulder blades for additional balance. The skin there smells like the discount-brand supermarket soap Will uses, but there is an invigorating scent of blood coursing underneath. Suddenly, he’s overcome by an urge to bring that sweet blood onto the surface.

He sinks his teeth into Hannibal’s nape, clenching his jaw until he feels hot liquid trickling onto his tongue. Hannibal lets out a surprised half-moan half-groan and his whole body jolts, almost throwing Will off him. He has to grip the man’s arms hard to keep him in place.

The way the eager ass pushes back onto Will’s cock is a clear indication that Hannibal enjoys the vicious treatment. Will smirks, licking the blood off his lips, and moves his hips faster.

“Did Antony — or whateverthefuck his name was — fuck you this good? — Bet he fucking didn’t,” he pants, teeth grazing the bite mark on the back of Hannibal’s neck.

There is nothing that screams ‘I’m jealous’ more than what Will had just asked, but he doesn’t care. If Hannibal chooses to answer ‘yes’ purely out of spite, which Will wouldn’t put

past his smug personality, he is going to sink his teeth in again. Harder this time, claiming his territory in a primal act of dominance.

Hannibal doesn't say anything, but his response is perfectly clear even without the use of words. His body tenses underneath Will in a series of spasming movements, culminating with him staining the sheets with his release.

Will watches, his hips continuing to ruthlessly drill into the divide between Hannibal's smooth but firm ass cheeks. In a minute or two, the staccato rhythm starts to stutter, and he finishes, slumping on top of Hannibal's body.

He feels fluid and boneless, which lets Hannibal flip him around onto his back with ease. Will yawns, an overpowering post-sex sleepiness rapidly taking over his body. He weakly raises an eyebrow when he feels Hannibal's mouth on his chest, nipping and sucking in places that are already sensitive.

He doesn't realise what happened until Hannibal has pulled back and flopped to lie down beside him. However, a glance down to his bare upper body tells him everything he needs to know. All the delicate hickeys left by Molly have now been covered by larger, redder and angrier marks produced by Hannibal. He added a few more of his own too, for good measure, higher up Will's neck where his shirt won't be able to hide them.

Will can't help but chuckle incredulously. Jealous bastards, both of them, marking each other with teeth like wild animals.

He turns on his side and pulls the covers over them, his exhausted body craving the sleep that is long overdue. The sun has already risen, which means Hannibal will probably soon have somewhere to be. Will doesn't expect him to stay; he doesn't have a single reason to, now that Will has sutured his bleeding wound.

He closes his eyes, hoping he'll fall asleep before he has to hear the footsteps and the sound of the front door closing. Will knows that him having to sleep alone is inevitable, but it's nice to entertain an illusion that he doesn't have to, even if just for a brief moment.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

After a few not so graceful but nonetheless determined movements, Will has maneuvered himself around the table and into Hannibal's lap, without ever disconnecting their lips. He licks into the man's mouth with his newly-found hunger, craving to consume, devour and engulf every drop of affection Hannibal is offering him.

It's a feast for the impoverished, a salvation for the forsaken. And Will is both those things.

Chapter Notes

Our two beloved serial killers try to be domestic. It ends up being harder than it looks.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will awakens to the sound of rain, endless droplets reverberating from every wall of his house. The gushing of the water is loud, almost artificial. Like a shower.

That would be impossible. Hannibal would've left hours ago, and the dogs don't know how to turn on the taps. Will slowly opens his eyes and glances around the room. He knows exactly what he's looking for, part of him hoping for a heartwarming discovery, but he is more than likely setting himself up for disappointment. However, Hannibal's boots are still by the door where he left them last night. So is the first-aid kit, sitting on the coffee table. And the thrumming sound of falling water is most definitely coming from the bathroom, not outside.

Perhaps, Will Graham is allowed to feel a small ounce of pure happiness. Once in a blue moon.

He gets out of bed, careful not to put too much weight on his swollen ankle, and hobbles to the front door to let the dogs out. By the time he refills their food bowls, the shower has stopped running. The bathroom door is now open so Will pads closer, only half-aware of the sheepish grin illuminating his face.

Hannibal is sitting on the edge of the tub, wearing nothing but a towel around his hips, and examining the cut on the back of his arm in the mirror.

"Morning," Will hums, "how'd I do?"

In daylight, his stitching job doesn't look quite as neat as it seemed last night. It's far from being on par with the work of a nurse or a doctor, but it's holding the sides of the wound together, which is the main purpose of stitches.

"Your effort is appreciated," Hannibal tells him tactfully, with a small smile tugging on the corner of his mouth.

He probably regrets not going to the hospital or resorting to patch his arm up himself, but must be too polite to voice his thoughts. A nice change to how he acted last night, with his unwelcome revelations about his sex life, Will notes grimly. Nevertheless, a big part of him is happy that Hannibal had decided to stay the night.

With Will's body now fully awake, so is his hunger. It announces its presence with a loud grumble of his stomach. He hasn't eaten since heading off to the fishing trip yesterday afternoon, and most likely neither has Hannibal. After a quick mental tour of the contents of his kitchen cabinets and fridge, Will realises he doesn't have any food to offer his guest.

"Coffee?" he asks. "I'm afraid that's all I have for breakfast."

"I figured that would be the case."

Hannibal's tone is an obvious shade of disappointed but not surprised. Will rolls his eyes. Not everyone can be a master chef with a fully stocked kitchen all the time.

"Well, I have frozen lasagna, but after a certain someone's actions, I'm forever put off by it now," he sasses back.

The expression on Hannibal's face is neutral, if not slightly amused. The man truly doesn't have a conscience. "Coffee will suffice for now then, thank you."

Will nods and saunters to the kitchen. Discovering flowers in his food was a fucked up experience, but he can't bring himself to be resentful about it. Not today. Not when waking up with Hannibal still here was exactly what Will wanted and needed.

Will smiles to himself as he prepares the coffee. It's a supermarket brand of instant, served black because he always forgets to buy milk. He doesn't deny that it's utter *shit*, but he drinks it for the caffeine, not the attractive appearance and taste. If it's too low-grade for Hannibal's extravagant standards, he can go fend for himself.

When Will brings two steaming mugs into the living room, Hannibal is already dressed. The soft cream-coloured lounge pants, a crimson-red sweater, and shower-damp disordered hair remind Will of all the times when they lounged in front of the fireplace in Hannibal's house, in a relaxed, post-coital state.

This, however, is different. It's the first time one of them stayed the night. And Will knows it isn't a big deal, just like the fact that they took so long to kiss, but it *feels* like a big deal. It feels like the next step in the evolution of their complicated relations. A step towards a *normal relationship*.

Will shakes his head, clearing the thoughts from his troubled mind, like a dog shaking water droplets off its fur. None of this means anything. They're not even together.

Hannibal accepts the coffee, once again polite enough not to comment on the all-round poor quality of the beverage. The only detail that gives away his true thoughts is a tiny wince he fails to hide when the first sip of the liquid enters his mouth. In all honesty, Will can't blame him for it.

"How far is the nearest grocery store?" Hannibal queries after another heroic sip.

"About 4 miles. Why?"

If Hannibal wants to eat so badly, why doesn't he just drive back to Baltimore? The city has way more dining options that meet Hannibal's high standards, compared to the middle of nowhere named Wolf Trap.

"You're in need of groceries, and you aren't able to drive."

He is right, there is no way Will can even get his car started with his ankle being too tender to put any pressure onto. Will sighs. He knew choosing a car with a manual transmission that requires two feet to drive would bite him in the ass one day.

"I can order takeout," he says dismissively.

"I doubt any restaurant would deliver to this area, considering how remote it is."

"There's a pizza place that will, if I tip extra," Will lies swiftly.

"It would be much easier if I picked up a week's worth of groceries for you. Surviving solely on pizza for days would be unhealthy."

Hannibal's voice is casual, but the underlying persuasiveness in it doesn't leave much room, nor desire, to argue. The ease with which Hannibal manages to sound utterly convincing is magical, if not pure evil. If Will were still a cop and this man told him he wasn't the serial killer they were after, Will would probably believe him without a second thought.

"You're severely underestimating my ability and willingness to cook anything that requires more effort than two minute noodles," Will objects. It's a weak argument, but he has to try.

Though, as soon as the words leave his mouth, he realises the trap he just walked into.

"If that is the case, I will cook for you," Hannibal tells him with a pleased smile dancing across his features.

What a manipulative asshole. With endearing intentions, but still.

"No," Will says in a tone that is firm and final, leaving no room for any further coaxing on Hannibal's part.

He has to draw the line somewhere, and letting Hannibal shop for him is already too much. Too affectionate, too *domestic*. They're just fucking. Well, maybe more than *just* that, but they are certainly not playing house.

"You can get me a few pre-made microwaveable meals and that's it," he announces bluntly.

Hannibal's smile fades, but the fond gleam in his eyes is still there. "If you insist."

"I do."

"As you wish, then. I should be back in an hour or so."

"Wait," Will rushes to stop the other man before he disappears through the door.

He reaches under the bed, retrieving a stash of cash he's earned from his far-from-legal jobs, and pushes a few notes into Hannibal's hand. To his relief, the man has the decency not to refuse the money, although Will is sure one shopping trip would do absolutely no damage to his wallet.

"Please try to stay off your feet as much as possible. It will expediate your recovery considerably," Hannibal instructs him in the place of a goodbye.

He is right; Will joining him on the food-buying endeavour is out of question, as he can't walk without needing to brace himself on the walls and furniture. His busted ankle is making itself known again with a throbbing ache, so Will resorts to dry-swallowing a few painkillers and settling on the couch for the day.

He plays with the dogs and mindlessly watches TV, all to distract himself from thinking about Hannibal and whatever is going on between them. There isn't much more Will can do when he's been rendered practically immobile. With Hannibal gone, it almost feels like he was never there in the first place, and Will is not sure if he is disheartened or comforted by that idea.

He can't deny that his injured state means he needs assistance with daily living, and that Hannibal venturing out to purchase necessities is going to save him a lot of trouble. Will despises appearing weak and relying on others, but it seems that he has no other choice. On the other hand, being cared for feels nice. It makes Will think that perhaps he plays a bigger role in Hannibal's life than just an occasional fuck. The notion that Hannibal is willingly spending his day off making sure Will is as comfortable as possible ignites something warm inside him.

Until he remembers *the other guy*.

If it were Antony who sprained an ankle, would Hannibal care for him the same way he cares for Will? His smitten heart hopes for 'no', while his rational brain insists on 'yes'. With a deep sigh, Will closes his eyes.

He awakens to Winston's tongue sliding across his cheek, not having realised he'd fallen asleep. There are sounds coming from the kitchen, suggesting that Hannibal has returned. He must have left the door unlocked.

A quick glance at the clock tells Will that he'd been snoozing for almost two hours. Another glance down tells him that there's a blanket wrapped around him that he doesn't remember getting for himself. This means that upon returning to the house and discovering Will floating in the dreamland, Hannibal let him continue sleeping and even found a quilt to keep him warm.

Will supposes he should find this cute. Affectionate. *Meaningful*.

All he finds is that he desperately needs to feed his starving stomach, and preferably top it off with some strong liquor.

Hannibal is in the kitchen, brow furrowing in concentration as he tries to decode the instructions on the back of a pre-made chicken and rice meal. With deep satisfaction, Will notes that the man decided to respect his request of ready-made microwaveable meals, as much as it must be jarring and foreign to him. Hannibal eyes the buttons on the microwave with skepticism and puzzlement written all over his features, and Will has to stifle a laugh.

"You just throw it in for a minute at a time and take it out once it's the right temperature," he offers, trying his hardest not to sound like he's explaining two plus two to a first-grader.

Despite the process being incredibly simple, Hannibal looks distrustful. It's no surprise that a culinary snob like him would look down on using a microwave, as if it somehow equates to cheating.

"That is not how you heat up a meal," Hannibal says, scrunching up his nose, "chicken needs to be warmed thoroughly, or you will risk contracting salmonella."

"It hasn't killed me to this day so I'm going to keep doing it."

Hannibal makes a disapproving sound and his eyes flick towards the good ol' stovetop. "You should be resting your foot."

"I feel fine."

If Hannibal insists on heating the chicken and rice the old-fashioned way using the stove, Will won't complain. He couldn't care less about the method, all he wants is to be able to dig into the meal as quickly as possible. His stomach is already churning in anticipation of long-overdue sustenance. Will plops into a chair, exhaling in relief as the weight is taken off his swollen ankle. So much for 'feeling fine'.

He watches Hannibal heat the food on a frying pan and transfer it to two plates. As soon as the meal is in front of him, Will devours several mouthfuls of rice and half of the chicken in the space of a few seconds.

“Don’t know if I should be surprised that you didn’t decide to serve me the guys you killed last night,” he comments after swallowing another piece of meat.

Knowing Hannibal the way Will does, he can safely assume that none of Verger’s men got away alive.

“To my great dismay, and perhaps to yours, too, that meat was unfit for consumption.”

“Oh?”

Will was able to piece together the main gist of what happened after he dove off the boat, but the precise details of it are still hazy. How did Hannibal know to find the shooters? How and when did he come across Winston?

Hannibal gingerly tastes the food on his plate before deeming it edible and taking another bite. “The evisceration that had occurred was too erratic and unsanitary. Repurposing the bodies had not been on my mind when I struck.”

The wording Hannibal uses is too vague and euphemistic, definitely downplaying the brutal bloodbath that took place, Will is sure of it. He wants to know. He wants to know all the grisly intricacies, the gruesome but true descriptions of exactly how Hannibal single-handedly slayed the men that tried to hurt Will. He wants to be able to picture the blood as it poured out of savagely-inflicted wounds, and smell the cruelty in the air as Hannibal’s unforgiving blade ripped into flesh.

Will’s voice is barely a whisper as he speaks. “Tell me how you did it. I want the details.”

Hannibal tilts his head. His pupils widen, endorsing Will’s hunger for the macabre even further.

“I tracked the three men to the boat ramp where you’d set your vessel on the water. At that time, I didn’t know if they had found you yet. As I took care of the first man, the second made an attempt to shoot me,” Hannibal explains, his eyes not letting go of Will’s.

The scene plays out in Will’s mind’s eye in such clarity that it feels like he had been there, personally watching it unfold. Hannibal snuck up on the men that were planning to sneak up on Will, motivated by nothing other than a ferocious need to protect, defend and avenge. The pouring rain obfuscated his tall and broad stature and concealed his footsteps, making him even more deadly than he already is. His mouth contorted into a snarl as he attacked, resembling a wild animal ripping into its enemies in order to protect its mate. There was no time for surprised yelps or attempts to fight back, as Hannibal took out his targets one by one with cold-blooded determination and precision.

Will blinks, pulling himself out of the scene into the present moment, and realises that his breath has caught in his throat.

“Evidently not a very strong attempt,” he notes in breathless awe.

The corner of Hannibal's mouth twitches upwards in agreement. "He didn't get a chance to dispatch more than one bullet."

Oh. So that's what the gunshot was. Not a hit aimed at him. Will immediately feels like an idiot for jumping off the boat in fear for his life, when it wasn't even him that was being targeted. Acting in the spur of the moment and ending up abandoning his dog and boat, as well as accidentally butchering his own ankle, is now taking the top spot on the 'Dumbest shit Will Graham has done' list.

His cheeks flush in embarrassment, and he tries to hide it by bringing a glass of juice to his mouth. To Hannibal, it must look like the sudden rosy tinge of Will's face was a flattered reaction to the cruelty he just described. Good. Will would much rather act flattered than tell Hannibal anything about the clumsy escapade he'd engaged in.

Not that he really needs to *act* flattered. The notion of Hannibal violently massacring several people for no other reason than to protect him makes Will's heart beat faster of its own accord, without any need for faking.

"The third man was more of a close-combat endeavour, and he managed to slice my arm. He quickly ended up meeting the same fate as his comrades, though," Hannibal continues the story, curious eyes drinking in every reaction displayed on Will's face.

Hannibal speaks with such nonchalance that it seems as if he is simply describing a normal day at an office job. Talking about killing people so casually makes him appear even stronger and more lethal than he already is. Will stuffs his mouth full of food and focuses hard on chewing, so that he doesn't end up reverently staring at the man in front of him with a slack jaw.

"I began looking for you and came across Winston eventually. I thought he would lead me to you, but we ended up searching with no success. The rain would have washed away the smell signatures, making it difficult for Winston to locate you."

Another image flashes behind Will's eyelids, of Hannibal and Winston in the hellish downpour, trudging through the damp woods for hours in search of him. Drenched, freezing and exhausted. Hannibal's arm would have been bleeding for a while by then, yet he didn't give up.

Will feels a tsunami of guilt wash over him for putting Hannibal and Winston through such an ordeal, all because of his own paranoid and clumsy actions.

"What happened to you?" Hannibal asks then, concern evident in his usually stoic voice.

Will should have expected the question, it would have naturally emerged sooner or later, after Hannibal first saw his hurt state. However, Will feels acutely unprepared to answer it.

"Uh. Shit went south where I was. Fucked up my foot. Lost Winston in the process and couldn't find him anywhere. Hitched a ride home. Long story," he mumbles, mentally praying to every deity in existence that the other man doesn't ask any more details.

Hannibal regards him with a thoughtful expression. "I was under the impression there were only three men after you, whom I took care of. But perhaps I was wrong."

"Perhaps..." Will agrees, thankful for the convenient alternative to the fiasco with the boat and his ankle. "Sorry for scaring you guys, I didn't mean to. And, uh — Thanks for everything."

Thank you for protecting me out there, for bringing Winston home, for getting the food, for taking care of me, he wants to say. But he doesn't, because he fears that if he opens his mouth, he will not be able to stop the outpour of pent-up words in his chest and blurt out things he will later regret. Things about himself, about them together, about what it all means; things that have previously been left unsaid but can be undoubtedly sensed in the air between them.

Will stays silent, hoping that his gratitude shows in his eyes.

"Had I been impartial to your safety and well-being, I wouldn't have done it, Will."

Will barely has time to say a hurried "Come here" before he's leaning across the table and pressing his lips to Hannibal's. The kiss is without a doubt going to taste like chicken and rice, but Will doesn't care. He isn't tasting with his tongue but with his senses, consuming a different kind of sustenance that is Hannibal's affinity for him, sustenance that feeds Will's deprived soul. He hadn't realised how truly starved he was until he first kissed Hannibal and experienced what it feels like to be nourished in a completely new way.

After a few not so graceful but nonetheless determined movements, he has maneuvered himself around the table and into Hannibal's lap, without ever disconnecting their lips. Will licks into the man's mouth with his newly-found hunger, craving to consume, devour and engulf every drop of affection Hannibal is offering him.

It's a feast for the impoverished, a salvation for the forsaken. And Will is both those things.

He pulls back reluctantly after a while, catching his breath. He's bitten Hannibal's lips raw, yet the swollen and pinkish-red flesh tempts him to keep going. Maybe he doesn't need to numb his feelings with the bitter booze, but to nurture them with the fiery kisses, adoring touches, and more.

Will wants to, he longs for it with every cell of his body. It's becoming more and more impossible to resist the terrifying but equally enticing abyss that is admitting his feelings towards Hannibal. In that moment, Will feels like he has finally found the courage to get entangled together, *to ignore the worst in one another in order to continue enjoying the best.*

He is ready. Ready to delve into it headfirst without looking back, if it wasn't for one thing.

"Do you care this much for everyone you sleep with?" he asks.

He searches for Hannibal's eyes, and once he locates them, he bores into the two amber-coloured voids, akin to a blade sinking into soft flesh. Hooking the man by his soul and not letting go, until he gives Will the answers he's desperate for.

“Will...” Hannibal sighs, trying to avert his eyes at first but then thinking better of it, dissuaded by Will’s intense stare. “Would you value a ring made of gold the same as a ring made of nickel?”

Will’s immediate instinct is to scold Hannibal for the cryptic bullshit he always says. But after thinking about the words for a minute and truly appreciating the meaning they carry, a different course of action forms in his mind.

They end up spending the rest of the day in bed, and how it happens is courtesy of Will’s coy scheming and Hannibal’s more than willing cooperation. Will’s excuse for wanting to remain horizontal is to rest his aching foot, and Hannibal either doesn’t see the ulterior motive, or more likely, is very aware but chooses to indulge Will.

Regardless, the outcome is exactly what Will wanted, from being a naked, sweaty, writhing mess under Hannibal’s body as they make the bed shift and shake, to snuggling into the warmth of his chest afterwards.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaaaand it's all smooth sailing from here! ...or is it?

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Will barks as a greeting to Hannibal, who opens the door in the wake of the forceful and persistent knocking.

Hannibal’s face is pure puzzlement and concern, and Will wants nothing more than to punch it. He draws his fist back in preparation to do exactly that, but Hannibal catches his arm before it inflicts any damage. Will glares, watching the other man’s demeanour change from confused to irritated in a second.

Chapter Notes

Hello! Apologies for the delay in posting, I changed jobs and am currently in the middle of moving house. I hope the drama and plot twists in this chapter make up for the delay!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next couple of weeks can only be described as lazy and unproductive, thanks to Will’s stupidly-acquired foot injury. He lives off of the pre-made meals Hannibal bought and spends most of his time lounging in bed or sprawled on the couch. He’s had to pull himself out of the gun-for-hire market for the moment, so it’s quiet on the job front too. Being commissioned while he can barely walk is the last thing Will wants.

He doesn’t mind not working for now, as he’d made enough profit from the past two hits to last him a while. The only downside to taking a little break from the usual hitman business is that Will is becoming increasingly bored with every passing day. It seems that not even Mason Verger is trying to keep him occupied anymore by sending more people to kill him. Though, in the grand scheme of things, it’s a relief.

Will’s days are long and uneventful, apart from the times when Hannibal comes to see him. His explanation for driving all the way to Will’s house in the middle of nowhere is to monitor the healing process of Will’s sprained ankle, because they both know full well that Will would never set foot in a hospital or any other medical establishment unless his life depended on it. However, every time Hannibal visits, his competent hands examine not only Will’s foot but the rest of his body too, staking his claim over it in a monsoon of sweat and lust.

Will likes to smugly remind him that he should be avoiding *strenuous exercise*, which Hannibal pointedly ignores in favour of sucking more bruises into Will’s skin. His regular

trips from Baltimore to Wolf Trap make sure that the love bites littering Will's neck, chest, and thighs never fade. Will doesn't complain in the slightest.

He'd like to think that the man also keeps an eye out for any new marks, ensuring that Will hasn't been sleeping with anyone else between his visits. There is a certain comfort in knowing that Hannibal feels just as territorial about him as he feels about Hannibal, and neither of them are afraid to show it. Will hopes so, at least.

Would you value a ring made of gold the same as a ring made of nickel?

The words replay in Will's mind like a broken recording, not giving him any peace. They linger in everything he does during the day and invade his dreams at night. Hannibal's analogy is supposed to make him believe that he is the gold while everyone else is the nickel. But Hannibal never actually outright said that Will is special to him, more special than others, which now makes Will paranoid about the man's true intentions.

Hannibal is awfully good with words, using them to build structures that seem like genuine and strong foundations, but in reality are a web of lies and deception. What he told Will was likely just a pretty metaphor designed to cloud his brain and give him a false sense of security. It was naive of Will to immediately assume Hannibal values him more than others, no matter how precious Hannibal's words made him feel. Will can't let himself be played like that, not again.

His foot takes an infuriatingly long time to heal, but once it's strong enough to be able to walk properly, Will is ready for action. There are only two things he is good at when it comes to people: killing them and fucking them.

He tracks his new target, starting with just the first name and the wine tasting event the man attended, and finishing with knowing his full name and address.

Will learns that Antony Dimmond resides in an apartment block in the inner suburbs of Baltimore and frequently visits the nearby bar. This mission seems to be a piece of cake. Bars, with their laid-back atmosphere, blaring music, and a never-ending clinking of glasses, are one of the few social environments Will feels at ease in. He spots the target as soon as he walks in, the tall stature and a hideous purple scarf giving the man away instantly.

Will doesn't rush through his plan. He sits back, orders a few beers over the course of the night, and pretends to be interested in the soccer match shown on the TV. How he passes the time is irrelevant; the main point is that he stays near the front bar, ready for action when Dimmond approaches in search of more liquor.

Will strikes up a casual conversation, deliberately steering it in the direction of literature and classical arts, instead of the obvious choice of commenting on the soccer. He has done his

research, as usual, so he knows Antony Dimmond has a literature degree from the UK and has recently arrived in the States to work at Johns Hopkins University. As predicted, chatting about Dante and Dumas piques Dimmond's interest, and judging by how he pulls up a bar stool to sit next to Will, it seems that the man is there to stay.

Will moves onto stage two of his plan. It isn't his favourite part, but it's the most important for the end goal he has in mind. He makes sure to laugh very audibly at the lame joke Dimmond makes — no, *Antony*, they're on first name basis now. Will sways in his seat, giving the impression of someone that is way drunker than he actually is, and grabs Antony's arm to steady himself. The man gives him a friendly grin, which Will matches with his more-than-friendly one, and it's a smooth road to a home run from there.

Based on what Hannibal said about Antony and his penchant for casual sex, Will can tell the man would be an easy lay. However, he didn't expect Antony to be *this easy*.

All it takes from Will is one seductive smile and the tall Brit is already all-in, coming up running like an excited dog when its owner shakes the bag of treats. Antony doesn't understand the concept of keeping his hands to himself, boldly grabbing a good feel of Will's ass when no one is looking, which causes Will to promptly decide to move the party from the bar to the man's apartment. As they fall onto Antony's bed in a mess of entangled limbs and hastily peeled off clothes, Will almost forgets that this isn't just a regular one-night stand. He's here with a purpose.

Antony isn't a stellar fuck, but he's good enough, and his eagerness makes up for where his bedroom skills are lacking. Will struggles to understand what Hannibal sees in this man. Maybe it's the stupid pretentiousness and overexaggerated love for aesthetics that both of them share. He hasn't known Antony for long, but he's already getting tired of having to fake an interest in Dante and all the other boring artists and poets.

Fortunately, Will won't have to endure it for much longer. He's got what he wanted now; a distinct, photograph-like memory of the birthmark on Antony's left hip bone. Proof that Hannibal's new boy toy is nothing special and will literally fuck anything that moves, including Will. Now, Hannibal's taunting mentions of sleeping with another man won't work on Will anymore, because he has been there himself.

Nothing, not even getting laid, feels more satisfying than giving Hannibal a taste of his own medicine.

"Want a smoke?" Antony asks, padding to the balcony in nothing but his outrageous lavender-coloured briefs.

Will accepts with a casual shrug. Tonight is all about pissing Hannibal off, after all, and Will engaging in 'poisoning his lungs' is just another nail to the coffin. Will joins the other man outside and lights the cigarette he's holding out.

"Fuck," Antony exhales after a long drag, "I haven't had a shag since leaving Cambridge."

Will freezes, almost dropping the smoke.

“What?” he asks, making sure he didn’t mishear.

“Been busy with work, and it’s kind of hard when you’re new to the country,” the man continues, oblivious to the cogs working overtime in Will’s head.

“Un-fucking-believable,” Will curses under his breath before he can catch himself.

“Huh?”

When he meets Antony’s eyes, he finds the man looking at him with a confused expression on his face.

“I mean. With a face like yours,” Will rushes to explain himself, hoping he can fix his idiot moment before it turns awkward, “unbelievable that you haven’t scored dozens already.”

He flashes Antony a blinding smile, praying it adds legitimacy to his words.

“You’re such a flirt. I’ve gotta get your number.”

Will relaxes, takes another drag, then quotes a string the digits seemingly from memory, as the other man punches them into his phone. He saves Antony’s number too, more as a polite formality than for any other reason, and finishes redressing. As he’s heading out the door, he catches Antony’s optimistic gaze.

“You’ll hear from me again, Virginia,” the man promises with a wink.

“I don’t doubt that, Cambridge,” Will answers, giving him one last grin.

A grin that grows wider and meaner as soon as Antony can no longer see him. The poor man will try to hit him up, no doubt, only to have a confused stranger pick up the phone and inform him that he must have the wrong number. Will can’t bring himself to feel bad about giving a fake number. All he cares about is the shocking discovery, and the anticipation of making Hannibal pay for attempting to fuck with him once again.

Will heads straight to Hannibal’s house, his driving style testament to the disbelief and anger he feels — sharp breaking, twitchy shifting of gears, drifting as he rounds corners at higher speed than is safe.

“What the *fuck* is wrong with you?” he barks as a greeting to Hannibal, who opens the door in the wake of Will’s forceful and persistent knocking.

Hannibal’s face is pure puzzlement and concern, and Will wants nothing more than to punch it. He draws his fist back in preparation to do exactly that, but Hannibal catches his arm

before it inflicts any damage. Will glares, watching the other man's demeanour change from confused to irritated in a second.

"I wasn't expecting you, but by all means, come in," Hannibal says in a tone that reeks of bitter sarcasm, pulling Will inside by the arm he is still holding.

Annoyance at Will's sudden hostility radiates from him like heat from a wildfire. It's as if he doesn't want Will making a scene on the front porch where his snobby neighbors can see, quickly pulling him into the privacy of the house. Such patronising treatment only adds more fuel to Will's wrath. How dare the asshole act like Will is the one being ridiculous, when he was the one that caused the whole fuckaround?

Will's eyes narrow. "And I wasn't expecting *you* to be a lying son of a bitch!"

He yanks his arm out of Hannibal's grip, only for the man to immediately catch it again and firmly lodge it between his own arm and flank. Will struggles against the hold as he is dragged down the hallway, resentfully realising that he underestimated how strong Hannibal is. He pulls his arm again, without success, and the grip on his wrist tightens further in a silent 'don't try'. Evidently, after letting himself be punched in the face once by Will, Hannibal isn't going to make the same mistake again.

Will curses and leans his whole weight on the recently-healed foot, so that his stronger one can swing freely. He kicks Hannibal in the shin as hard as he can, knocking him off balance, which causes them both to collapse on the floor. Without wasting any precious time, Will throws himself onto the other man, pinning him down with his body.

"You lied to me about sleeping with Dimmond. You made up the whole thing to make me feel jealous," Will seethes.

His hand curls into a fist in preparation for the long-awaited blow. Hannibal dodges masterfully, twisting his head to the side a millisecond before Will's punch connects with the wooden floor. He curses as an agonising sensation shoots through his knuckles, but refuses to back down.

"What makes you think so?" Hannibal asks, chest heaving with every sharp inhale.

Feigning innocence right up to the last moment. Will wants to strangle the living daylights out of him.

"We fucked," he spits out, "and he told me I was his first since getting to the States."

Hannibal blinks, visibly astounded by Will's decision to seek out Antony. Once his momentary shock is over, the only warning Will gets is a quick dart of the amber eyes to the wall on their left, before Hannibal throws him off and pushes him into said wall. Will grunts in pain but recovers quickly, the self-defense techniques he learned in the police academy swiftly coming back to his memory.

He knees Hannibal in the stomach as he turns, eliciting a similar pained groan from the older man. Will swings his fist again, determined to land it into the smugly smiling flesh this time,

but Hannibal prevents it with an elaborate block that looks like an element of some Eastern martial art. Will's hand ends up trapped, once again, this time in the hook between Hannibal's bicep and forearm.

With his front now exposed and practically inviting Hannibal to punch the breath out of him, Will remembers exactly why he tries to avoid physical fights as much as possible, even after being heavily trained in them in the police academy. He may know the main strategies of hand-to-hand combat, but lacks the practice and necessary muscular strength to execute them. As a result, he can see himself being overpowered by Hannibal very soon, unless he does something unpredictable.

Fighting dirty is widely regarded as dishonourable, but Will has never been a man of honor. Quite the opposite, he makes his living from killing unsuspecting civilians. Not just that, but he eliminates them with his sniper rifle from a safe distance, never giving them a chance to stand up for themselves in a fair fight. *Fuck honor*. Being the sleaze that he is, Will jams the fingers of his trapped hand into the back of Hannibal's arm, exactly where the wound inflicted by one of Verger's men is, and digs his nails in.

Hannibal howls and releases Will, and Will uses the opportunity to tackle him onto the floor again. As he presses Hannibal down with his body, he makes sure that his knee collides with the man's balls. *For being a fucking liar*. Watching Hannibal's eyes fly wide open at the unexpected assault on his family jewels is extremely satisfying, however, as soon as the pain in those eyes is replaced with menacing vengefulness, Will immediately regrets his actions.

His face hits the floor with brutal force as his entire body is flipped around onto its front, the weight of Hannibal on top of him pressing him flat into the ground. Will instinctively lets out a gulp, which comes out resembling more of a choked-up gasp as Hannibal's hand tightens around his throat.

"You fight like a teenager," Hannibal growls in his ear, equal measures of threat and mockery in his low-pitched voice.

Will twists his head to the side as much as he can with the iron grip on his neck, so that his words don't get muffled by the thick carpet lining the floor.

"And you make up stories about sleeping with people for drama. *Like a teenager*."

Hannibal doesn't respond for several seconds, which tells Will that his point is bulletproof. He sinks his nails into Hannibal's wrist in hopes he loosens his hold before causing permanent damage to Will's vocal cords.

"Now let me go," he croaks, struggling to get Hannibal off him.

"Are you going to keep fighting?"

"No," Will concedes, but his voice remains just as venomous and confrontational.

The weight of Hannibal's body pinning him down lifts, and Will pivots onto his back, catching his breath. His compulsion to throw fists and draw blood is slowly deflating, giving

way to more reasonable thoughts. He may have been overpowered physically, but he most definitely won the verbal sparring. And as much as he wants to punch Hannibal for making him jealous over nothing, a bigger part of him wants to know what motivated Hannibal to lie in the first place.

Will sits back against the wall with a heavy sigh, eyeing Hannibal with equal amounts of disdain and curiosity. Now that the blinding anger has faded, he has a million questions.

“Why’d you —,” he begins, but Hannibal interrupts him with a question of his own.

“What were you hoping to achieve by getting in bed with Antony Dimmond, Will?”

Before entering the house, Will had pointedly decided that he would ignore all of Hannibal’s attempts to turn the conversation back on him. Hannibal is to blame for this mess, and Will wouldn’t let himself be convinced otherwise.

However, when Hannibal speaks, the emotion in his voice forces Will to reconsider his strategy. The man sounds dispirited and shaken up, he sounds *hurt*, and as much as Will tries to keep himself closed off to Hannibal’s feelings, for his own good, he finds his resolve crumbling.

He expected Hannibal to be angry. The fear-provoking, hostile and vengeful kind of anger that makes one see red. Will wanted to face that unleashed wrath and retaliate with his own equally destructive temper. What he didn’t quite anticipate seeing was the disheartened and crushed look in Hannibal’s eyes, devoid of any desire to fight or argue.

Will hates it, hates that Hannibal has managed to soften his heart, even without actively meaning to. Deep inside his chest, Will is compelled to feel bad for upsetting the man, but his mind won’t allow it. He has too much respect for himself to be the one feeling sorry in a situation that is clearly Hannibal’s fault.

“You said he’s good with his hands. Didn’t want to miss out on the action,” Will replies snidely.

Hannibal stays poised, the way he purses his lips being the only indication of his dejected state. His eyes lock onto Will’s, delving deep into the blue abyss of his irises, no doubt trying to find answers of his own.

“And did that pursuit leave you satisfied?” he asks.

Will laughs, an incredulous and bitter sound ringing in the otherwise silent room. Sleeping with Antony had been below average, and the only reason Will engaged in it to begin with was to get back at Hannibal.

“Hell no,” he replies sardonically, shaking his head.

“Nor would I have been, I suppose,” Hannibal admits, casting his eyes away.

“Yet you made a point to brag about it when you’ve probably never even spoken to the guy.”

Hannibal stays silent for a while. Evaluating his motivations and realising he acted like an ass, Will hopes. Though, knowing Hannibal and his unapologetically egocentric self that only cares about his own hurt feelings, it's a lot to hope for.

"That may have been impulsive," the older man states eventually.

"It wasn't impulsive, Hannibal, it was plain fucking stupid. You lied because you felt jealous."

"You gave me a reason to be."

Will lets out a groan and rubs a hand across his face. "Because I slept with Molly? Jesus, Hannibal..."

"You say that as if you are the only one whose jealousy got the best of him."

Hannibal's voice tastes like an accusation, not the spiteful kind but rather truthful. He is right; Will sleeping with Antony was an act fueled solely by jealousy. An eye for an eye, of sorts.

Sitting on the floor in the hallway of Hannibal's house, dishevelled and sore after the impromptu wrestling match, staring at each other in such an intensely grudging yet wonderfully possessive way, Will realises that they're just as bad as each other. Double-damned, co-cursed, each condemning the other further as they plummet to their shared downfall.

"If I catch you doing that again, I'll be done with you," Will says then, pushing the words out from behind gritted teeth. It's the one and only warning he'll ever give. "By *that* I mean lying to me. And fucking other people."

Hannibal inclines his head, eyes trained on Will. The anguished tinge in his eyes is now replaced by something different as he considers the ultimatum. Hope? Optimism? Though, in Hannibal's typical fashion, those emotions are still dressed in skeptical stoicism.

"It is only fair that I expect the same of you," he states contemplatively. "And as such, I should implement consequences for those kinds of transgressions, should they occur *again*."

Again. The word sends a shiver down Will's spine. Although his one-night stands with Molly and Antony weren't exactly cheating due to the lack of a formally defined relationship between him and Hannibal, they *feel* like cheating. Will feels like he's been unfaithful, like those nights were mistakes, reckless deviations from the one true path he's meant to be on. Doing it feels wrong, and he's already a repeat offender, so he can understand Hannibal feeling apprehensive about it.

"Let me guess. Both me and whoever I touched would end up eviscerated and cooked into a dish that symbolises great treachery and shame?"

Hannibal gives a satisfied nod, visibly amused and entertained by the suggestion. "I do consider infidelity an unforgivable offense."

Will is familiar with Hannibal's moral code regarding cannibalising the rude. The prospect of ending up *on* Hannibal's dinner table instead of *at* the table is a cruel way to die, but Will realises that in all its gruesomeness, it doesn't have as much of a deterring effect as intended. His utter lack of interest in sleeping with anyone isn't induced by an external threat. It stems from within, from his own intrinsic commitment to the cause.

Thus, Will placing conditions regarding Hannibal's future behaviour, and Hannibal doing the same to him doesn't feel wrong. Moreso, talking about conditions sounds like they are negotiating some kind of an agreement for the future. In fact, Will can tell what exactly they are negotiating, and the realisation makes his insides flutter, akin to having butterflies in the stomach. In all his adult life, Will has never experienced a feeling like that.

Hannibal clears his throat and stands, straightening his vest and button-up shirt and stretching his hand out to Will.

"Now, would you care for a drink? I think that officiating the ground rules for our relationship is a fitting occasion for corking the finest Bordeaux in my collection."

Will nods absent-mindedly and grabs the man's hand, letting himself be pulled to his feet. There is no ambiguity to Hannibal's intentions this time; he said the word himself. *A relationship.*

The term has such a clear meaning that at first, it seems misplaced when applied to their complicated situation. Too simplified, too mundane for a pair of criminals whose love-hate dynamic has escalated to the level of trying to get each other killed. But on second thought, their mutual agreement to be exclusive and committed to each other cannot be better described by a word other than 'relationship'. And the conversation negotiating the terms of said relationship took place in the exact way that is typical for them; brusque threat-like promises exchanged immediately after a vicious fist fight.

For the kind of abominable creatures that they are, Will would expect nothing different.

Chapter End Notes

Our babies are finally formally together!

As always I appreciate your thoughts on the chapter (surprised that Hannibal lied?) or any kind of comments. <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

“What I mean is, I’d like to invite you out for dinner with me,” Will mumbles into the phone.

Hannibal chuckles, the affectionate timbre spilling out of the receiver into Will’s ear. Of course the man knew what Will had in mind, but decided to force him to say it out loud.

“I would love to dine with you, Will.”

“Great. Uh. It’s at an Italian place called La Primavera. Saturday night.”

Chapter Notes

Hello, i'm FINALLY back with another chapter! So sorry that this took so long, life has been so busy and between starting a new job and moving house I haven't had much time to write. Here we are though, 2 months later. I hope you enjoy the update!

“Hey,” Will mumbles into the phone, teeth catching on his lip as he speaks.

“Hello, Will,” replies the familiar accented voice.

“How’s it going?”

“I’ve been well. How about you?”

Will shifts his weight from one foot to the other and chews on the side of his cheek. “I’ve been good, yeah.”

There is silence on the other end of the line, the kind of a pause that can quickly turn awkward if stretched too long. Will subconsciously tightens his grip on the phone and takes a fortifying breath.

“Look, uh. I won something in a local raffle,” he begins, “a dinner for two.”

“How lovely. Congratulations.”

Although Will can’t see the man, he can picture in his mind the curious tilt of Hannibal’s head; knowing that there is more to Will’s call than just sharing the good news, and

prompting him to say the rest.

The problem is, though, that Will doesn't know how to say it.

"Yeah. Thanks..." he mumbles.

Fan-fucking-tastic. This call is turning out to be a complete disaster. Will tries hard to ignore the hot flush that's suddenly coating his face and neck. He clears his throat and tries again:

"What I mean is, I'd like to invite you out for dinner with me."

Hannibal chuckles, the affectionate timbre spilling out of the receiver into Will's ear. Of course the man knew what Will had in mind, but decided to force him to say it out loud.

"I would love to dine with you, Will."

"Great. Uh. It's at an Italian place called *La Primavera*. Saturday night."

"I know the one. A truly delightful establishment."

The corners of Will's mouth turn up. It's relieving to know that the restaurant is up to Hannibal's tastes. "Okay. I'll pick you up at six, yeah?"

"I look forward to it."

"Me too. I'll see you then."

Will hangs up and lets out a long, heavy exhale.

He knew Hannibal wouldn't have declined his invitation, especially now that they're officially dating. But that doesn't make the act of *asking him out on a date* any easier. It's like Will is back in high school, getting flustered and tripping over his words when trying to talk to his crush.

He had researched *La Primavera* prior to telling Hannibal about it, to make sure the restaurant would meet his high standards. Judging by the lavish Florentine-style interior, decadent dishes, sublime reviews, and a hefty price tag attached to all of the above, the place seems to be exactly what a man like Hannibal would enjoy.

Since the restaurant's code is dress to impress, Will has looked into purchasing a suit. The pathetic excuse of formalwear he wore to the opera would be extremely ill-fitting for this occasion, mainly because Will would hate to show up to the dinner date in the outfit that reminds them both of the time they tried to have each other killed. So, Will hunts down a suit, something that is elegant enough to make him look well put together, but nothing too extravagant.

On the day, he completes his look by grooming his facial hair, combing his wild mop of brown curls, and spraying on some cologne. It's the kind he may or may not have purchased specifically because Hannibal recommended it to him. The fragrance is unusually strong and artificial, but Will figures that it beats smelling like dog hair and three-in-one shampoo.

At exactly six o'clock, Will rolls up to Hannibal's driveway in his Volvo station wagon. His humble car stands out immediately and painfully amidst all the posh Ferraris and Rolls-Royces, but he hopes his put-on confidence and sophisticated-looking clothes compensate for it. Hannibal emerges in a timely manner, in appropriately formal attire himself. He's dressed in a cream-coloured suit with a windowpane check pattern, and Will is pleased to notice that it's an item he hasn't seen before. Perhaps Will wasn't the only one who acquired a new outfit specifically for this outing.

The short drive to the restaurant passes with pleasant surface-level chatter. Hannibal tells him about the mind-numbingly boring patients that he sees, and in turn, Will fills him in on the uneventful life of his dogs. It's been years since Will has been on a proper date so he finds himself at a loss for topics to talk about, even though he knows Hannibal well enough that it shouldn't be a problem. He's grateful to finally enter *La Primavera* and have the extraordinary interior make him speechless, as it was already difficult to find words to say.

Their server guides them to a table in a quiet corner of an enormous mezzanine overlooking the ground floor of the restaurant. It's the prime spot to admire all the stunning furniture and decorations of the establishment. The design of the place was heavily inspired by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the waiter tells them, and the replicas of famous paintings covering the walls indeed make the room feel like a prestigious art gallery.

Much like the opera, a five-star restaurant like this is another setting that Hannibal fits perfectly into with his expensive taste and ostentatious mannerisms, while Will feels incredibly out of place. He orders a glass of wine to soothe his nerves, pointing at an item in the long list of alcoholic beverages with fake confidence, as if he didn't just pick it out at random. Although frequent dinners at Hannibal's have broadened his palate, Will is still far from being an expert in fine wines.

Once their meal orders have been placed and wine glasses delivered into their hands, Hannibal sets his curious eyes upon him.

"Tell me, Will, how did you become the man that you are?"

Will lifts an eyebrow. There's too much ambiguity to the question. How did he become what? A reclusive, sarcastic asshole? A man cursed by a unique kind of empathy? A father to seven dogs and zero children? A contract killer?

"What do you mean?"

Hannibal smells his wine before taking the first sip — one of his many peculiar habits. "I would like to hear about your beginnings. How and where did you grow up, and what led you to the career path you're currently on?"

Ah, it's the contract killing. Will supposes that the unusual nature of his profession would naturally evoke questions about how he got involved with it.

"Dunno," he answers with a casual shrug, "I always liked shooting things down."

It's been a thing Will loved since as far back as he can remember, from using a self-made slingshot to knock down rows of cans as a young boy, to excelling in archery as a teenager. He always knew that he wasn't like the other kids and that there is something deeply fucked up in enjoying the thrill of training his aim onto targets and firing. Even better if those targets are moving.

Hannibal's head tilts to the side, the telltale sign of him being intrigued by Will's revelations, inviting Will to elaborate further.

"It was the only thing I was good at, really, so I thought why not make a career out of it. I ended up joining the police after finishing school, to become a sniper for SWAT teams and the like."

"And did you?" Hannibal asks, inquisitive eyes not leaving Will's.

"Yeah. That's where I learned everything I need for my current... *occupation*."

Judging by the small smile that lightens up his face, Hannibal is quite entertained and amused by the mental images of Will in the SWAT gear on a mission to bring down a dangerous criminal. It's even more amusing now that he knows Will switched sides somewhere along the road.

"They told me to apply to the FBI after a couple of years. Apparently my hit rate was that impressive."

Admiration is evident in Hannibal's eyes. "I take it, you didn't follow that advice."

"I did, actually. I met all the entry requirements," Will corrects, much to the other man's surprise. "Except the psych eval. 'Too mentally unstable' is what they said."

At that, Hannibal lets out a judgmental 'hm'. His bottom lip curls to indicate clear disapproval of the Bureau's decision, which fills Will with a soothing feeling of validation.

"I firmly believe that our society needs to stop deeming individuals as mentally abnormal whenever they fail to meet the unrealistically narrow criteria for 'normalcy'."

"Good thing my current job doesn't ask for a fucking psych clearance," Will comments with a cynical chuckle, "and it pays way better."

Hannibal, the connoisseur of everything immoral and controversial, raises his glass to that.

"The moral confines our society places on us forces us to evolve into a different direction."

Will's eyes meet Hannibal's from behind the rim of his wine glass. Now it's his turn to be curious.

"Yeah? What made you evolve into a different direction, then?" Will asks, setting his drink down to focus better on the man in front of him.

“I would say that there have been multiple significant events, particularly in my formative years, that have shaped my evolution into who I am now. However, I believe that the foundations for it were innate.”

Will offers an incredulous smirk. “You were born wanting to kill and eat people, huh?”

“If I were, would you see it as something undeserving of a place on earth?”

There is a certain solemnity to Hannibal’s face when he speaks, as if he isn’t indifferent to what the answer will be.

“No, not really.”

The reply comes easily to Will; he’s never been one to judge others based on their moral stance.

Their food arrives in the next moment, colossal and delicious-smelling plates filling the empty space on their table. Will thanks all those dinners at Hannibal’s once again for allowing him to learn proper dinner etiquette. Without it, he wouldn’t know which of the multiple sets of forks and knives in front of him are meant to be used with each dish.

“Tell me about yourself,” Will asks once they have taken the first few bites out of their meals. “Which part of Europe are you from?”

He could easily tell that Hannibal is not American the first time they met, but he hadn’t given the man’s origins much thought apart from that.

“I was born in Lithuania, spent my adolescence in France, and my twenties in Italy.”

“So well-travelled,” Will comments with an impressed little whistle. “Did your family move around a lot?”

Hannibal pauses eating, dabbing the corner of his mouth with a thick linen serviette. A pensive look falls on his face, as if he’s deliberating how much of his past to disclose.

“My parents passed away when I was ten years old,” he reveals at last.

His voice is so uncharacteristically neutral and detached, so devoid of any kind of emotion, that Will’s heart misses a beat. If Hannibal has to keep his voice and face so horrifyingly dispassionate, how many painful emotions is he trying to keep under control? How profound is the anguish he is trying to hide?

Will struggles to find the right words to say.

He expected Hannibal to have come from a wealthy family and had a relatively idyllic childhood. However, his knowledge of killers’ psychology tells him there must’ve been a dark stain somewhere along the way. Maybe Hannibal’s parents were involved in the mafia, and he was made to witness violence and death from early on, being the eldest son and therefore the future leader of the mob. Will imagines that an experience like that would have

desensitised Hannibal to acts of brutality and cultivated a taste for inflicting pain upon others later on in life. He expected all kinds of things, but he didn't expect *this*.

"Oh... I'm sorry," is all he can manage to say.

"It was a long time ago."

Hannibal's voice is reassuring, a sign that he has moved on from the tragedy. But Will, who is prone to getting lost in the emotional states of others, isn't so easily assured. He can sense that there is so much Hannibal has left unsaid, and the things he senses fill him with chilling dread.

Although Hannibal didn't specify how his parents died, Will can tell it wasn't simply an unfortunate accident or a health complication. Their lives were forcibly *taken* from them, by the deliberate hand of somebody ruthless and sadistic. It wasn't a graceful, dignified death. It was sudden, shocking, and drenched in terrified screams and free-flowing blood.

And Hannibal, a little boy at the time, had stood there and watched, never getting a chance to say goodbye.

Will blinks, sudden tears welling up in his eyes. Who could be so heartless as to murder a young child's family in front of his eyes? The man capable of such a thing must've had no remorse. He saw Hannibal's parents, and undoubtedly many others before them, as nothing but meat going to slaughter. It wasn't a crime of passion but an act carried out in soul-crushing indifference, committed with ease as if it was something akin to a mundane job.

Exactly like what Will does for a living.

Suddenly, the lavishly-decorated walls of the restaurant start to converge above him, and Will can't remember how to breathe. How many children did he orphan by claiming his paychecks? How many families did he destroy? How many innocent kids did his actions traumatize and inadvertently turn into deviant and fucked-up adults?

And more importantly, how does Hannibal feel about Will being tantamount to the man that took his parents' lives?

"Hannibal, I could never —," he stammers, shaky words coming out without conscious control, "I would never..."

"I know. You had nothing to do with it."

The timbre of Hannibal's voice is calming, and in combination with him placing a hand on top of Will's hand, it succeeds in alleviating some of the sudden burst of painful emotions that has gotten a hold of Will.

"But I feel responsible."

"Will," Hannibal says softly yet convincingly, thumb stroking the back of Will's hand, "you're not."

Will lets out a long exhale, relishing in the feeling of their hands touching, a singular point of contact that is somehow so soothing. He feels like a small boat on a rising tide, the only thing protecting him from being swept into the depths of the sea is the unyielding dock that is Hannibal, anchoring and securing him to the land. He turns his palm up and encloses Hannibal's hand in a grateful grasp.

The older man murmurs something about ordering dessert, and Will nods dazedly. He lets Hannibal get the waiter's attention and choose something for them while he collects himself. When the raspberry panna cotta arrives a few minutes later, Will is thankful for the distraction and immediately digs his shiny dessert spoon into the soft jelly-like texture.

They switch to talking about something else to lighten the mood, and Hannibal even manages to slip in an innuendo suggesting that this isn't the only dessert course they will be indulging in tonight. Will flashes him a coquettish smirk in return, already feeling excitement in his lower region for what is about to come.

"*La Primavera* was an excellent choice, Will. Thank you for organising such a wonderful evening for us," Hannibal tells him as they wait for the valet to retrieve Will's car.

"I didn't choose it. I won it in a raffle."

Hannibal isn't surprised in the slightest by Will's denial of involvement. If anything, it looks like he was fully expecting it.

"You don't buy raffle tickets," he points out. Not as an isolated observation but as an indisputable fact.

"Fine," Will admits in a mirthful huff. "You got me."

He briefly wonders at what point did Hannibal work out that the whole dinner date was fully and deliberately planned and paid for by Will, and that winning and luck had nothing to do with it. Hannibal knows him too well, and the notion makes Will feel warm inside. Warmer than all the high-end wine he's consumed over the course of the meal. He leans in just enough to press his upper arm against Hannibal's and tip his head onto the taller man's shoulder.

The fact that the return trip from the restaurant to Hannibal's house takes less time than the initial drive only proves that they are both itching to go somewhere private. Going out together in public was a lovely experience, but now Will craves being surrounded by only Hannibal's presence and nobody else's.

Their pristine suits are already half-shedded when they fall onto Hannibal's large canopy bed. Will gets comfortable on the indigo-coloured sheets while Hannibal gets rid of the remaining clothing articles preventing them from fully molding their naked bodies together.

Although this is far from the first time they've done this, it feels different somehow.

It's an all-round familiar arrangement, with Will clutching at Hannibal's biceps and his calves resting on the older man's shoulders, yet there is something new simmering beneath the

surface. It's like an ache filling Will's bones, a yearning that desperately needs to be sated. And it doesn't start to melt away until Hannibal is inside him, making it dissipate further and further with every powerful thrust of his hips.

Will can't seem to put his finger on what the novel feeling is. It's not quite the regular kind of loneliness that can be cured with any warm body next to him. It's not quite the hunger for a quick release either, otherwise he would've dragged Hannibal into the restaurant bathroom, uncaring that their food went cold.

It all centres around Hannibal, Will knows as much. He needs Hannibal, and it's more than just a physical craving, more than just an endeavour to satisfy his most primal desires. But while sleeping together isn't the point of it, it's definitely part of the equation. It seems that when he and Hannibal are together, they completely redefine the basic concepts that Will thought he already knew, such as sex, attraction, and relationships.

Romance, in Will's mind, is like a tree stump; rigid, unappealing, and not really something he's ever been interested in. But growing closer with Hannibal has transformed the stump, causing fresh little sprouts to emerge from under the dry bark and evolve into branches that bear leaves, flowers and fruit. New colours, new possibilities, new life.

That notion in itself is astonishing. He didn't think that he, Will Graham, would be capable of inspiring such growth and bloom in anyone, let alone himself. He is the Grim Reaper in a person-suit, bad to the bone, someone that *kills others for a living*. His purpose is to hunt and destroy, never to create and nurture. And yet, when he and Hannibal embrace the connection between them, it feels like they're creating something *good*. Something that ignites an overbearing need in Will to care for, nourish and protect what they have.

Will shivers in awe at that, shudders under the burning touch of Hannibal's hands and mouth. He seeks the man's lips, lets their teeth collide, and drowns himself in the heated kiss. And then he's tumbling over the peak of pleasure, toes curling and hips riding out the thundering wave that washes over his entire body. He doesn't let go of Hannibal even after they're both completely spent and lying on top of each other in a tangle of ragged breaths and intertwined limbs.

Although the silence is satisfying and comfortable, Will can't help but voice the question that's on his mind.

"Do you think the universe will find a way to punish us for our lack of morals?"

He can feel Hannibal's mouth form into an amused half-smile where it's pressed against his chest.

"I don't believe in morals. Only morale."

Will closes his eyes and considers the words. Maybe that's all there is. A life spent existing true to one's self and sharing it with a true soulmate is worth whatever consequences come afterwards, even if it involves being condemned and rejected by every other living being.

They're going to find out, together.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“What are we going to do about it?” Will asks after swallowing another mouthful of delicious waffle.

Hannibal tilts his head, looking at Will from behind his mug of coffee. A little amused smile, his trademark, appears on his face.

“What would you have me do?”

“I’d say don’t bother with quick and painless,” Will says, his voice almost a purr.

The rampant rage in him has now been replaced with a more controlled but nonetheless violent desire for blood. Hannibal hums in approval, visibly pleased that he and Will are on the same page.

“I’d love to have her for dinner.”

Chapter Notes

Back with another chapter! Will's contract killing business takes a rather unexpected turn.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will’s phone rings. Not his personal phone, but the *other one*. Which means that someone visited his website and liked his services enough to make an enquiry.

Will’s arm shoots up from beneath the bedcovers to grab the buzzing device from the nightstand. Buster, who was jolted out of sleep by the sudden movement, gives a surprised little yelp and moves to the other end of the bed.

“Hello?”

“Good morning. Is this Wolf Trap Boat Repairs?”

The voice belongs to a woman. It’s rich and smooth, syllables rolling slowly like thick honey. Will blinks the remnants of sleep out of his eyes and forces himself to focus. Being self-employed means every client is valuable, as he doesn’t know when he will get business next.

“It is. How can I help?”

“My boat is in need of servicing, and the matter is rather urgent.”

The lady on the phone sounds confident and determined in what she wants. It’s been quiet on the job front lately, so Will welcomes the opportunity to earn a little income.

“Sure. What do you need done?” he asks, moving into a sitting position on the bed, bare feet brushing the cold floor.

“I have had a thorough look through your website. What I’m after is the ‘*Total Refurbishment*’ service.

Oh. It’s one of *those* jobs. Will’s eyes automatically flick to the corner of the room where his rifle is stashed under the wooden floorboards.

“Alright. My rates are listed on the website, and fifty percent of the total cost is required upfront as a deposit before I start anything.”

There is a pause on the other end of the line.

“Fifty percent?” the woman repeats. The skepticism makes the honey of her voice seem even thicker. “Doesn’t it seem excessive to you? What guarantee do I have that you will complete the job?”

Will rolls his eyes. If he doesn’t charge a sizable deposit, what guarantee will *he* have that she won’t trick him into committing murder for her and then disappear without paying? Will needs to know that his customers are serious about what they’re hiring him to do, and can afford the price.

“Well, there is none,” he states bluntly. There is no place for sugar-coating in this kind of business. “But I’m sure that whoever referred you to me wouldn’t have done it if they weren’t happy with how I operate.”

Will doesn’t know who the lady is, but he knows one of his other customers must’ve recommended him to her. Otherwise she wouldn’t have known to ask for *total refurbishment*.

The woman hums, contemplating his terms. “And for the sum that you’re charging, how fast will you have it done?”

“My usual turnaround is one month, at most.”

There is another, longer pause as she thinks through her decision one more time.

“We have a deal.”

Will’s mouth forms into a pleased half-smile. His hand reaches out to scratch Buster behind the ear, now that the dog has forgiven him and cuddled up against his leg again.

“Good. Now I need as much information as possible about your *boat* . The specs, photos, everything you’ve got.”

They agree on a time and place to meet so that Will can collect his deposit and learn about the person he’s about to put a bullet in. Before this, his wallet wasn’t exactly starving, but the promise of thick wads of cash flowing in is certainly whetting its appetite.

Everything about the woman exudes an old air of money and prestige. Her blonde hair is arranged into delicate curls, her skin is smooth and radiant despite being over the cusp of middle age, and there is a necklace of precious diamonds adorning her chest. They shake hands and she introduces herself as Ms. Lydia Fell. A fake name, no doubt; a common occurrence in Will’s line of work.

A nondescript brown paper bag is already sitting on the table next to Ms. Fell’s steaming cup of coffee, sealed for now. For someone who is about to seal the deal for a cold-blooded assassination, she doesn’t look nervous or hesitant at all. In fact, everything in her exterior seems to be carefully controlled.

It’s like she’s hiding behind one-way glass; seeing Will for who he is, while keeping herself concealed.

A jaded wife wanting to get rid of her cheating husband? A corporate femme fatale offing the colleague that caught her red-handed? The possibilities are endless. The only thing Will is sure of is that she is smart and cunning.

He sits in the chair opposite her, crosses his legs and leans back. Pure confidence and stone-cold professionalism.

“Did you bring the deposit?”

“In the package.”

Ms. Fell slides the paper bag across the table. Will opens it, revealing several neat stacks of cash. He briefly counts the bills with his eyes, satisfied when it looks to be the right amount. She doesn’t seem like the type that would dare to so blatantly shortchange him, anyway.

Next to the money is a bundle of what looks like photographs and notes. Typed up, not handwritten. As Will thought, this woman is smart and careful. He could bet there are no fingerprints anywhere on the contents of the package either. He pulls the items out to have a look.

The first thing that immediately stands out is the man’s name. Unbelievable and utterly impossible, like a waterfall in the desert, or a fucking football match in space.

Will's eyes widen, and he reaches for his coffee to steady himself. The hot drink burns his throat, but the sensation goes unnoticed as his attention remains on the piece of paper, refusing to acknowledge what he's seeing.

Moving onto the photos doesn't make it any easier, either.

Will recognises the first picture right away. He recalls seeing it on the website that he used to book a psychiatry appointment for the imaginary Adam Towers. The photo depicts a man from chest up, positioned against a plain grey background. The familiar ash-blond hair that's parted on the right side. The familiar dark blue plaid suit. The familiar enigmatic smile. The familiar eyes that are a little too sharp to be considered fully innocent.

Amidst all the disbelief and rage, one thought emerges in Will's mind.

How fucking dare she?

He takes another sip as he steadies his breath, then slowly raises his eyes up to "Lydia Fell". The nature of Will's job is such that the less personal he keeps his interactions with the customer - or the target, for that matter - the better. But *this level* of personal isn't something he can ignore.

Fear develops alongside Will's anger. What if she'd taken her request to a different hitman, someone who has no attachment to the target and would have no qualms eliminating him? Despite the cappuccino warming Will's insides, he feels a chill run through his body.

His hand that's resting on the table twitches just the slightest bit. A subconscious response to the scenario playing out in Will's mind, where he grabs a cake fork from the neighbouring table and drives it into Ms. Fell's exposed jugular. It would serve her right. Will wants to hurt the woman then and there for conspiring to lay a hand on what's *his*, if not just outright kill her. But he refrains, for now.

As Hannibal would say, the hunt must be treasured and the meal must be savoured.

Hands operating on autopilot, Will places the contents back into the brown bag and downs the rest of his coffee. Ms. Fell seems none the wiser, blissfully unaware of the huge mistake she has made.

"Is the deal still on?" she confirms, delicate hands curled around her cup.

Will gives a curt nod. "I'll see you in one month, Ms. Fell."

He leaves a five dollar bill on the table for his drink and heads for the exit.

He dials Hannibal's number as soon as he gets into his car. However, the pre-recorded voicemail greeting politely informs him that Hannibal is "unable to take the call and will get back to him at his earliest convenience". With a groan, Will realises that it's Monday and that the man has clients to see. He resorts to sending a message that urges Hannibal to call back as soon as he's on his way home so that Will can meet him there.

Will drives back to his place, figuring that he can research things while he waits. It would seem that tracking down a woman that called him from an anonymous number and introduced herself with an obviously fake name would be difficult, but Will wouldn't be a successful hitman if he didn't know how to acquire the information he needs using only a small lead.

The so-called Lydia Fell clearly knows Hannibal, which already narrows down the search to Hannibal's professional and personal acquaintances. The woman didn't reveal much else that could be used to pinpoint her real identity, so Will turns to his intuition.

People can lie with their words and actions, but the subtle undertones in their demeanours are almost always a reflection of their true thoughts and feelings. Fortunately for Will, he can read those undertones as clearly as if they were written on a neon billboard.

One-way glass.

One-sided relationships. Unequal dynamics. A power differential. Much like a doctor and a patient, or an examiner and an examinee. Sitting in front of Ms. Fell then felt like sitting in front of the guy in a white coat that conducted his psychological evaluation as part of the FBI entry exam.

A psychiatrist, then.

After working out that crucial piece of information, finding Ms. Fell's real name is a piece of cake. Will searches the register of Maryland mental health practitioners, successfully picking her out of the sea of unfamiliar faces. Those box-blond curls are impossible to miss.

Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier. Currently on hiatus from psychiatric practice due to undisclosed personal reasons.

Interesting. Will tilts his head and opens a new tab in his browser. A quick Google search of Dr. Du Maurier reveals several articles detailing a fatal incident that happened in her office just about a year ago. A patient attacked her during a session, and Dr. Du Maurier ended his life in self-defense.

Not the first time she's dipped her long manicured fingers into murder, then.

The phone starts chiming, and Will is pleased to see Hannibal's name on the screen. He'd expected to wait well past 5 pm, knowing that most people like to have their therapy appointments after work. But it turns out that Hannibal, *the saint*, prefers to keep his Monday afternoons patient-free.

Although Will has given him practically no notice of his arrival, Hannibal still welcomes him into his home with his usual immaculate hospitality. In less than half an hour after coming home, he's whipped up a decadent lunch consisting of savoury waffles with bacon.

All that with absolutely zero displeasure or complaints regarding Will interrupting the flow of his day. The privileges of dating, Will realises. The notion makes him smile.

He watches Hannibal's face as he breaks the news. Judging by the way Hannibal's fingers tighten around the fork he's holding, the notion that someone wants him dead makes him angry. Angry, but not surprised.

"What are we going to do about it?" Will asks after swallowing another mouthful of delicious waffle.

Hannibal tilts his head, looking at Will from behind his mug of coffee. A little amused smile, his trademark, appears on his face.

"What would you have me do?"

Will mirrors the man's movements by lifting his own mug to his mouth. He takes a slow sip, savouring the taste. Although the cafe that Ms. Fell - no, *Bedelia*, the entitled hag - picked for their meeting served good coffee, Hannibal's pristine freshly-ground beans taste way better.

"I'd say don't bother with quick and painless," Will says, his voice almost a purr.

The rampant rage in him has now been replaced with a more controlled but nonetheless violent desire for blood. Hannibal hums in approval, visibly pleased that he and Will are on the same page.

"I'd love to have her for dinner."

Will's laugh is cold and sharp, like the blade of a butcher's knife. Giving the woman a jab of her own medicine will taste even better than Hannibal's coffee.

"I can't wait."

He spears his fork through a juicy piece of bacon and transfers it into his mouth. Someone piggish and gluttonous like *Bedelia* would make perfect bacon, no doubt.

"Does she know you?" Will asks. As much as the woman's intentions are making him enraged, they're also making him curious.

Hannibal inhales the smell of his coffee before taking a sip. "She's my therapist."

Will stops mid-chewing to stare at him.

"You have a *therapist*?"

He can't deny that Hannibal is twisted, troubled and a fucking serial murderer, which theoretically warrants therapy. But people like that are exactly the kind that won't go see a

professional because they think there's nothing wrong with them. Will snorts. There is no way someone like Hannibal, whose ego is the size of fucking Jupiter, would seek counselling for his issues.

"The first step in ensuring my patients receive the best possible care from me is to monitor my own psychological well-being."

Will stuffs more waffle into his mouth to stop himself from emitting another incredulous snort. A wolf in sheep's clothing, then. It explains why the man sees a psychiatrist, sure, but doesn't explain anything else.

"But why does she want you gone?"

Hannibal contemplates the question, draining half of his cup in the process.

"Dr. Du Maurier has a secret," he reveals eventually. "And although I have no intention of exposing it, she considers me a liability."

Will can picture it clear as day. A fierce and ruthless woman who's gone as far as to kill her patient to protect herself. There is nothing stopping her from doing it again.

Then, the picture becomes even clearer.

"This is related to the guy that attacked her, isn't it?"

The corners of Hannibal's mouth turn up. "Clever boy."

Will is no *boy*, but that's a misconception he's going to correct later. For now, he basks in the notion that he hit the nail on the head.

"You sent him after her."

"Not in the way you're thinking. I *referred* Neal to her."

"Oh, so he was your patient first. You knew he was unstable." Will swallows, washing the food down with more coffee. "You planned it."

Hannibal shrugs, dodging the responsibility.

"Given Neal's predisposition for aggression and Dr. Du Maurier's disproportionately heightened survival instinct, I was hoping for a certain outcome. And it turned out my predictions were correct."

"It's not a secret that she killed the guy," Will points out. He can see the overall picture, but not every piece has found its place yet. "What else is she hiding?"

"The circumstances of it. Neal had anger issues, but not to the extent of threatening anyone's life. Dr. Du Maurier got a little carried away, so to speak."

Will nods, picturing it in his mind. Bedelia didn't have to kill her patient, but she *chose to*. And she's about to do it again. She doesn't have to kill Hannibal, but she prefers to tie off the loose ends. Or rather, to cut them off completely. Will delights in thinking about what they're going to cut off of her.

"I helped her cover up the crime," Hannibal explains.

Will opens his mouth to ask why. Then, he realises that he doesn't have to ask.

"You helped her so that she would feel indebted to you. So that if she ever discovers who you are, you will have leverage."

"Precisely."

Although it makes him shiver, Will has to admire the invisible strings Hannibal has attached to the people around him, puppeteering them into whatever direction he desires.

"Jesus. You're fucking evil."

"The word I would use is 'resourceful'."

Resourceful. Manipulative. Scheming. You fucking name it. The kind of man that has calculated your every move and planned a counter-move before he's even met you. The kind of man that treats others as nothing but disposable pawns in his big game.

Will rolls his eyes. "I bet you're really good at chess."

"Care to find out for yourself?"

Will follows Hannibal's gaze to the bookcase in the corner, where a foldable chess board is sitting on the top shelf.

He shakes his head in polite refusal. "I don't know how to play."

It's only a half-lie. Will does know how to play. He's played some friendly matches against people in college and even won sometimes, but it's been years since he touched any kind of board game. If he admitted to Hannibal that he's familiar with chess, the man would challenge him to a game. And Will wouldn't stand a chance against someone so smart and calculating. He would lose in an instant. Not just lose, but be utterly *obliterated*.

The thought of having Hannibal as his opponent, even if it's just a harmless little game of chess, causes a chill to run up Will's spine. He behaves boldly and fearlessly around the other man, aggressively even, to show that he isn't scared, but at the end of the day it's just a facade. An artificial and misleading exterior he's learnt to use the years to compensate for the fact that his height, weight and strength are average at best.

In comparison to the six-foot killing machine that is Hannibal, he can't help but feel inadequate.

Which is stupid, because Hannibal is his *partner*. They're on the same side, and there is no reason for Will to feel intimidated by the man's intelligence or strength. He shakes his head again, scattering the irrational thoughts away.

He is never going to stop feeling insecure if he keeps building walls instead of bridges.

"You could teach me," Will offers with a small smile.

Hannibal smiles back. "I'd love to."

Hannibal crosses the room to fetch the board. Just like everything else in the house, it looks like it cost at least a million dollars. The black and white squares are made of marble, and the wood making up the sides of the board is lacquered and smooth. The chess pieces look like they've been carved from stone, likely the same marble as the squares.

Will moves their empty dishes into the kitchen to make room on the dining table. Listening to Hannibal explain in detail what each piece is called and how it moves isn't the most exciting activity, especially because Will has to pretend he doesn't know all of it already. That isn't the point, though. The point is that they're doing something together that isn't eating or fucking.

Not that there's anything wrong with fancy dinners and sex. It's just that if they keep doing nothing but those two things, they will grow bored of it, and of each other, very soon.

By now, Will knows painfully well that they are two very different people, with different interests and lifestyles. And although the attraction between them is definitely present and isn't just physical, Will wants to make sure there is enough gas in their burner to keep them going in the long-term. Bridges don't magically appear, they must be *built*.

Doing things together. Finding activities they both enjoy. That's what's going to make their relationship last. Even if it's something insignificant like board games. Because it's not about the chess. It's about how Hannibal's features soften without him realising, making him smile wider than he normally does. It's about how there is a spark of joy in his eyes, showing how much he enjoys teaching the game to Will.

It's the little things, but they are the things with a big impact.

Feet moving without conscious thought, Will rounds the table and plants himself onto Hannibal's lap. The older man lets out a surprised chuckle.

"Darling, you can't sit here," he murmurs. Despite that, his arm sneaks around Will's middle to keep him in place. "The configuration of the board requires that you sit opposite me."

Will twists around to place a finger over Hannibal's mouth in a shushing gesture. Then, he replaces the finger with his mouth.

"We can rotate the board when it's my turn."

Hannibal exudes warmth and comfort, the sensations Will has been living without for so long. And someone out there wants him dead. So no, Will isn't going anywhere. His arm

settles alongside Hannibal's arm that's hugging his waist, and laces their fingers together.

"Plus, seeing the board from your perspective as well as my own will help me learn quicker."

Hannibal's lips brush his temple. "What a brilliant mind you have."

Will closes his eyes, savouring their closeness for a moment. The toxic blend of fear and fury brewing in him develops a new flavour; the need to protect and cherish. Before today, killing has been simply a job to him. A mundane and repetitive process of pulling the trigger, akin to scanning grocery items at the register. Crimes of passion have always been just an abstract concept in his mind. A distant idea, no feelings attached.

Until now. For the first time in his life, Will is finding himself actively *wanting* to kill.

He wants blood. And blood he will receive.

Chapter End Notes

What's going to happen to poor Bedelia, any ideas?

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Will's gaze shifts to the thigh-high stockings and garters Hannibal is holding, and then back to his face. "Put them on."

"I thought you were itching to have me nude and on the bed as soon as possible," Hannibal points out.

Will meets his eyes, vexation turning into challenge and impatience turning into lust.

"I do. *Put them on.*"

Chapter Notes

This chapter has been heavily inspired by [this art piece](#), which got me thinking about Hannibal wearing this exact outfit but with thigh-high stockings. I couldn't get the idea out of my head, so here you go, enjoy this chapter that is 10% plot and 90% smut. Sorry not sorry~

"Is she coming?" Will asks, leg bouncing with pent-up anticipation.

Hannibal ends the call, turns off the screen of his phone, and puts it back in his pocket.

"There was hesitation and caution on her part, and not unduly so. But yes."

Will's mouth stretches into a grin, and he feels like a little kid who has been conspiring with his friend to plan some grand mischief. The mischief being the brutal demise of their unsuspecting peer. It would be cruel if she were innocent. But she isn't, which makes their plan *righteous*.

"We agreed on Wednesday night, 7 o'clock."

"What kind of a psychiatrist agrees to dine at her patient's house?" Will huffs with an incredulous eye roll.

He doesn't complain though, not at all. The vengeful and bloodthirsty part of him awakens from its hibernation and sharpens its claws, crimson-coloured eyes and knife-sharp teeth glinting with excitement.

“She knows I’ll be there, right?” Will asks then, hesitating. They haven’t outright discussed his role yet. Will assumes he’ll be joining the dinner and having the front row seat for the carnage that’s about to happen, but he needs to be certain. “Don’t want to tip her off with my presence before the fun really begins.”

“She will be expecting a co-host, yes. I have told her that I have a partner now,” Hannibal answers, a warm smile illuminating his features.

In response, Will feels warmth igniting in his chest too. He can imagine the pride and delight on Hannibal’s face as he opened his therapy session with Bedelia by telling her that he’s now dating someone.

How unfortunate for her that this someone happens to be the very man she hired to kill Hannibal.

Another thing they haven’t discussed yet is how exactly dear Dr. Du Maurier is going to meet her end. But not having a precise plan for everything is part of the charm, Will supposes. It leaves room for passion; acting based on raw and righteous emotion, and delivering the fatal blow when it *feels* right.

Despite their lack of specific planning regarding this aspect, there is one thing that Will knows for sure. No matter how much he wants to kill the woman himself, he will let Hannibal do the honours. It’s Hannibal whom she has wronged, first and foremost, so it’s fitting that he will be the one dispensing justice. Will is content with simply observing.

It’s going to be like watching a movie. An extremely gruesome, yet satisfying, movie that he knows the ending of. And after it’s finished, he will get to fuck the lead star six ways to Sunday.

Perfect.

The afternoon light seeps through the thick velvet curtains of Hannibal’s bedroom, painting shadow patterns onto the floor. Will is sitting on the large bed, drumming his fingers against his knee. *Impatient.*

There is a very obvious and straightforward reason why they’ve ended up here. No more than 5 minutes earlier, they were downstairs, and Hannibal latched himself onto Will’s neck, kissing and nipping it while his hands started to unbutton Will’s shirt. So Will, not in the mood to be bent over the harpsichord or fucked against the wall this time, had determinedly pulled them towards the bedroom.

He’d thought it was a good plan, one that made his intentions crystal-clear. But as soon as they got to the room, Hannibal’s attention was stolen away by his spacious walk-in wardrobe.

Specifically, the collection of pristine suits inside it. Will presumes the man is about to choose an outfit to wear to the dinner with Bedelia. Despite it being several days away. And despite Will having a *far* better activity planned for them to do right now.

He holds back a groan.

“Would you please fetch me something?” comes Hannibal’s voice from the depths of the wardrobe. “The white tie with red floral patterns. Top drawer in the cabinet on your right.”

Will gives an affirmative yet slightly annoyed sound in response, and gets to his feet. He pulls open the drawer, expecting the entirety of it to be taken up by an extensive array of ties. He isn’t wrong. The ties, all fifty million of them, are meticulously folded and arranged by colour. It takes no more than a few seconds for Will to find the one Hannibal asked for and hand it to him.

The man hums a thank you and goes back to flipping through the countless suits, looking for the perfect one. All while frustratingly oblivious to the persistent hard-on in Will’s pants. With a sulky eye roll, Will walks back to the cabinet to shut the drawer. However, his hands linger on the handles.

Hannibal is being a pain in the ass, and not the kind Will was hoping for.

So, he lets his attention wander to the drawer beneath the one full of ties, and pulls it open. If Hannibal has a problem with Will unashamedly looking through his belongings, he is welcome to express his grievances to Will in bed. The more aggressive, the better.

The drawer second from the top turns out to be the place for accessories. Mainly watches, belts, suspenders and cufflinks, but also several exotic boutonnieres and tie pins. Together, the items probably amount to a small fortune. Will clicks his tongue, shooting an irked glance towards the wardrobe. Hannibal appears to still be preoccupied with making love to his precious fucking suits instead of Will, so Will decides to make his way further down the dresser.

The next drawer is underwear and socks, unsurprisingly folded and arranged according to the same system as the ties. Albeit with less colours and patterns. By now, Will has had enough experience seeing — as well as touching and *removing* — Hannibal’s undergarments to know that the man prefers neutral shades and plain material. Nothing extravagant. The complete opposite to all the other clothing he wears. Will lets out a small laugh; maybe there is a part of his eccentric boyfriend that is normal, after all.

He thinks of closing the drawer and going back to perusing the watches and cufflinks in more detail. Or pounding into Hannibal against the walls of the wardrobe so hard that all the suits fall off their hangers. But then, something in the sock drawer catches his eye.

A little sliver of shiny nylon in the sea of black and grey cotton socks. Will grabs it and pulls. He fully expects it to be another pair of socks, just more delicate and translucent than the rest - because what else could it be? Will’s eyebrows rise higher and higher the more material is exposed as the result of him pulling on the end. What first looked to be a pair of regular socks turns out to be closer to... *thigh-high stockings*.

Black, semi-transparent and elastic, with a lace trim at the top. Will turns them over in his hand, the shimmery fabric feeling cool and smooth against his skin. There is something else bundled together with the stockings, too. Two black bands with small metal clips attached to them.

“Are these yours?” Will asks, voice heated with delightful curiosity and *something else*.

Hannibal, who has now finally emerged from the land of suits, looks at the items in Will’s hand.

“Yes.” His tone is nonchalant, as if Will was asking about the weather.

Will’s gaze shifts to the socks and garters he’s still holding, and then back to Hannibal.

“Put them on.”

“I thought you were itching to have me nude and on the bed as soon as possible.”

Will meets his eyes, vexation turning into challenge and impatience turning into lust.

“I do. *Put them on.*”

He isn’t sure if it’s the unexpected request or his assertive tone that makes Hannibal comply. Either way, Hannibal sheds his pants, underwear and socks with a pace that is a little too urgent to be considered casual.

As he carefully slips his bare legs into the stockings, pulls them up above his knee, and attaches them to the garters encircling his upper thighs, Will is unable to tear his eyes off. The moment Hannibal is done, Will pushes him onto his back on the bed and leaps on top, positioning himself between the other man’s legs.

The rest of Hannibal’s clothes, the waistcoat and tie, join the pants on the floor — courtesy of Will’s eager hands. He’s about to pull off Hannibal’s button-up shirt too, but the man reaches up to press their lips together.

Will kisses back, if only for a short moment. He wants *more*, and he wants it *now*. His hand presses flat against Hannibal’s sternum and pushes the man back onto the bed with a firm hold. Fuck the shirt, it can stay. Will’s other hand has already fished out lube from the bedside table and is pulling Hannibal’s legs apart and up towards his shoulders.

“I didn’t know you liked lingerie,” Hannibal breathes, desire overshadowing the amusement in his tone.

To be honest, Will didn’t know either. He couldn’t have possibly predicted that accidentally finding stockings among Hannibal’s clothes and wanting to see him wear them *as Will fucks him* would be the kind of thing that would go straight to his cock. He couldn’t have known. But now that he knows, there is no going back.

“Keep your legs still,” is all he ends up saying in return.

It sounds like an order, and Will punctuates his words by grabbing one of Hannibal's shins and dragging his fingers across the silk-like material. The sheer black layer makes Hannibal's legs look thinner and more elegant than usual, while simultaneously accentuating every toned muscle under the skin. It feels as smooth as it looks, and Will barely registers plunging his fingers through the ring of flesh between Hannibal's asscheeks in favour of staring mesmerizedly at his legs.

If he weren't aching to push his cock into that alluring chiasm of flesh as soon as practically possible, he would ask Hannibal if he had matching lacy underwear too, to go with the stockings. Maybe another time. Right now, Will isn't going to waste another minute thinking about anything other than how good Hannibal's body is going to feel around him.

Hannibal seems as eager to give as Will is to take. He spreads ferocious kisses everywhere he can reach and drags his fingernails across Will's flanks so hard that they leave behind lines of red raised tissue. Will moans at the sensation and slows down the scissoring motion of his fingers just enough to take a proper look at the man in front of him.

Hannibal looks positively debauched. Nothing short of godlike, and they haven't even started. The pearl-white dress shirt is still on him, unbuttoned and draped around his sides, showing off his broad and refined chest. The thigh-highs are shimmering under the light, pulled as far up as they can go, making Hannibal look both extremely classy and utterly lewd at the same time. Will can't resist him any longer.

He pulls out his fingers and fills the empty space left in their wake with his aching cock. The slow but insistent intrusion draws a half-groan half-moan from Hannibal's lips, and Will echoes it with his own. The heat of Hannibal's body is welcoming and intoxicating; a solid embrace that moulds into shape to accommodate him.

Hannibal's arms enclose him into an embrace of their own. They encircle Will's midriff tightly, and Will pictures him as a lethal cobra coiling around its prey. Playing with the food before sinking its fangs in.

Will instinctively bares his neck.

The teeth come with a bruising grip, making him yelp in pain and pleasure. The bite is followed by a soft press of Hannibal's lips that immediately eases the burn. Soothing, hypnotizing. Between the mouth that doesn't cease lapping at the side of his throat, the arms holding him snugly, and the rhythmic rocking and thrusting of their bodies together, Will feels like he's about to be plunged into an ecstatic trance that's out of this world.

He opens his eyes, not ready to be completely lost to his pleasure just yet, and looks at the man beneath him. Hannibal's hair is a mess, his eyes are hot like a branding iron, and there is an electric current thrumming underneath his skin that sends sparks through Will's body every time they move against each other.

God, he looks ethereal.

Will's mouth moves without conscious thought. "You look like a god, you know?"

Hannibal chuckles, the soft sound rumbling in his chest almost like a purr. He angles his hips up, allowing Will to push even deeper inside.

“I don’t recall Eros ever wearing stockings.”

“You’re your own god, then,” Will whispers into his collar bone.

Hades, but full of life, lust, and vigor. Cupid, but more cunning, sinister, and deadly. The magnificent godlike creature that is Hannibal can’t be described with words; too intricate for a human mind to understand, and too powerful for it to control.

But Will, a mere mortal, will be his *undoing*.

He is going to catch the monster by the throat, mount him with his hips, and devour him until there is nothing left. He will carve his name across Hannibal’s naked body with nails, teeth, blood, and sweat. He will capture Hannibal, claim Hannibal, and own Hannibal.

And Hannibal, just as much an enamoured beast as he is a starving man, will take pride and delight in being owned by Will in such a way.

Will kisses him, hard and ravaging, matching the force with which he’s snapping his hips against the back of Hannibal’s legs. He wishes there was more blood, but at the same time he holds back, knowing that there will be. Later. He only needs to wait a few more days. And then Hannibal will give him a show; lay an offering at Will’s feet in the form of a corpse of the woman that made an attempt on his life. *An attempt on their life together.*

The anticipation of a bloodbath draws a growl from Will, and he spreads Hannibal’s nylon-clad thighs further apart to make room for his primal desire. Hannibal meets his thrusts with equal passion, bending his legs to hook them behind Will’s back.

A sharp slap to Hannibal’s cheek makes him halt his intentions.

“Stay still,” Will orders, yanking Hannibal’s legs from around his back and up towards the man’s shoulders, where he initially had them. “I want to see them.”

He sinks his nails into Hannibal’s shins to keep them in place. The lingerie is useless if Will can’t look at it while pounding into Hannibal with increasing fervour. And it turns out he’ll go as far as to *slap* his partner to get what he wants.

It’s only when Will looks the man in the eye again that he sees the consequences of bringing his hand to Hannibal’s cheek. There is a vicious impulse brewing behind Hannibal’s dilated pupils, a compulsion to break free from underneath Will, pin him down, and *hurt* him. The temptation for retaliation is real, saturating the air between them, and for a brief second Will is certain that Hannibal is going to let go of his vice-like self-restraint and lash out.

The possibility of it frightens Will and makes the blood coursing through his body come to a standstill. Then, in a chilling rush, it travels downwards and makes his already profound arousal skyrocket.

The next moment is frozen in time, like a snapshot from a fast-paced movie. It's nothing but them. Just Will, unmoving, staring into the eyes of a predator. That is when he realises that no matter how fascinated Hannibal is with the killer in him, no matter how much he enjoys Will bringing his aggressive and domineering side into the bedroom, he would never fully *submit* to it.

Or would he? Will considers it a challenge.

His hips try to pick up the pace again, but the movement is halted by Hannibal's hands on his stomach. He shoves Will back, body twisting to wriggle out from underneath Will. To flip them over, to regain power.

A challenge it is, then. Will bares his teeth.

He catches Hannibal's wrists and pins them down on the mattress on either side of the man's head, repositioning himself on top. He feels the muscles of Hannibal's arms tense in preparation to break free. Will presses down harder. Hannibal's strength is at least equal to Will's, if not greater, but in this moment, Will has the whole weight of his body working to his advantage.

"I said, stay still and *take it*," he practically growls right into Hannibal's face.

Uncaring of the consequences. Unafraid of imminent retaliation. And to show that, Will bottoms out and slams back in so hard they both see stars. The impact causes Hannibal's body to clench, impossibly tight, sending a wave of euphoria through Will's cock and into the rest of his body. When Will looks down next, he sees that both their stomachs have been painted with white.

He lets go of one of Hannibal's wrists in favour of wrapping his hand around the man's cock and stroking him through the remainder of his orgasm. Will's own hips don't stop pistoning in and out, the rhythm becoming more abrupt and careless with each thrust. Only after Hannibal snakes his free arm into Will's hair and pulls him down for a kiss full of stinging teeth, Will reaches his peak.

He pulls out in time to come onto Hannibal's plump ass, right over the swollen rim. It's a marking of a kind; he paints Hannibal with his colours now, and in a few days, Hannibal will paint them with red blood.

Feeling completely spent, Will rolls over onto his back beside the other man. Hannibal, the neat freak, keeps his knees up to avoid getting cum on the precious stockings. Will can't help but to huff out a laugh. Although every muscle in his body feels like gelatin, he decides to be gentlemanlike for once and gets up to retrieve tissues and clean Hannibal off. Once Hannibal's abdomen and ass are dry, Will lies back down perpendicular to the other man and rests his head on Hannibal's stomach.

"Ferocious thing, you are."

The muscles of Hannibal's belly fluctuate as he talks, making Will's head bob up and down.

“I don’t know what came over me,” Will admits with a small chuckle. “The thought of you wearing these was hot and I... guess I needed it. The anticipation is making me antsy.”

Will brushes his thumb lazily over the black lace trim of the stockings. He pulls on the garter lightly, just to let go and make it snap against the skin of Hannibal’s thigh. At that, Hannibal lets out an appreciative hum. His hand finds its way into Will’s hair, twirling a curly lock at the top of Will’s head between his fingers.

“Anticipation of our dinner with Bedelia?”

“Anticipation of what happens *after*.” Will’s voice is barely more than a whisper.

He turns his head to the side so that he can meet Hannibal’s eyes. The older man’s hazel orbs shrink, giving way to dilating pupils. He immediately understands that Will’s *hunger* is not for the food.

Then, his expression changes to curious.

“You kill for a living, so you must be used to it. What is so special about this one?” Hannibal muses.

Will shoots him a disbelieving glance. Isn’t it obvious? Surely Hannibal who is so well-versed in dispensing death all around him knows the difference between killing for necessity and killing for passion. Surely he feels the difference deep in his bones and soul.

“You know what,” Will dismisses, swatting playfully at the other man.

“I can’t say that I don’t.” Hannibal’s eyes are dark like an eerie lake where hellish creatures are hiding just below the surface. “But I want to hear it from you.”

Will shrugs and gives in.

“Because it’s *personal*.”

Hannibal gives another hum, this time thoughtful and pleased, as if he’s discovered a facet of Will that he didn’t know existed until now.

“You’ve never killed for personal reasons before,” he notes, intrigued eyes on his partner.

“No.”

In the time Will has been alive, he’s gotten many people’s blood on his hands, but none of it has been personal, *per se*. There were a few people he’d had to put down in self-defense when he served in the police force, people whom he didn’t personally know but who he knew had done bad things. It was a matter of ‘kill or be killed’, so he did it. Not because he wanted to, but because he *had to*.

After that, Will began his job as a hitman and killing became a way of securing paychecks. He doesn’t personally know his targets there either, nor does he know whether they are good

or bad people, but that hardly matters anymore. The people that make up his professional body count have been accumulated not because he wanted to, but because he *chose to*.

There's never been a time he killed purely because of the guttural, carnal urge to rip the life out of someone that knew his name. Never killed because of the satisfaction it would bring to slaughter a specific person for the specific ways they had wronged him. Never killed solely because he *wanted to*.

But in the bottom of his charred sinner heart he knows that soon, this will change. Hannibal smiles at him, insidiously innocent and bone-chillingly sinister at the same time.

“In that case, darling, you are in for a *feast*.”

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“Good morning, Will.”

“Mmh-morning.”

“Did you sleep well?”

Hannibal pulls the briefs off, depositing them into a laundry basket next to the ensuite bathroom. The action presents Will with an up-close and unrestricted view of Hannibal’s ass. The ass Will devoured mere 15 hours ago.

“Yeah. Hot,” Will responds, followed by an indulgent yawn.

“Are you describing how you slept or showing your appreciation for my body?”

Will snorts. “The first. But if the shoe fits...”

Chapter Notes

Will and Hannibal have a conversation that is looooooong overdue.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will wakes up sweaty. Hot, even. Bright sunlight is illuminating the room, its yellow-toned rays heating up the already warm bed. It must be approaching noon. The covers have been pushed into a pile against the footboard, and somehow over the course of the night, Will has managed to strip down to his underwear, too. He’s always been a hot sleeper, but not to the extent of waking up practically naked every morning. However, when put in the same bed with Hannibal, whose body is like a natural furnace, Will wearing any kind of clothes to bed becomes pointless.

All the better for Hannibal, he supposes with a lazy grin. No better way of waking up than pressed up against his partner’s naked chest.

Noticing that the other man isn’t lying beside him, Will glances around the large bedroom. He spots Hannibal in front of the full-body mirror hanging on the wall beside the walk-in wardrobe. Hannibal’s state of dress is minimal; much like Will, he isn’t wearing anything but a pair of shimmery metallic-gold boxer briefs.

So much for being a normal boyfriend with normal underwear.

Hannibal turns around, eyes shining brighter than the gleaming sunlight at the sight of Will awake.

“Good morning, Will.”

“Mmh-morning.”

“Did you sleep well?”

Hannibal pulls the briefs off, depositing them into a laundry basket next to the ensuite bathroom. The action presents Will with an up-close and unrestricted view of Hannibal’s ass. The ass Will devoured mere 15 hours ago.

“Yeah. *Hot*,” Will responds, followed by an indulgent yawn.

“Are you describing how you slept or showing your appreciation for my body?”

Will snorts. “The first. But if the shoe fits...”

A smile tugs on the corner of Hannibal’s lip at that. He steps in front of the mirror again, fully naked this time, eyes slowly travelling down the length of his body. As if he’s checking himself out. Will could swear the man has enough vanity and shamelessness to power an entire city.

On the backs and sides of Hannibal’s lean legs, there are several red and raised lines, starting at his hips and ending midway to his upper thighs, just above where the thigh-high stockings reached. Marks caused by Will scratching him last night.

“What a wild thing you are,” Hannibal hums, examining the nail marks first through the mirror and then by looking at them directly. A small smile is still dancing across his features, and his eyes are a dark golden-ochre shade of *pleased*. “I can never predict you.”

Will’s mind rewinds back to the night before. Their night together where Will took charge. Ordered Hannibal around, told him what to wear, slapped him, fucked him, and marked him with his cum. And Hannibal, both the sweet gentleman and the untamable monster, *obeyed*. He put his overbearing need to dominate and control on pause and let Will take the reins.

It’s not that Will hasn’t taken a leading role in the bedroom yet, and not like he hasn’t fucked Hannibal before. The difference is that the previous times were the result of Will taking charge with pure force, establishing his dominance through a display of animalistic power, *rightfully earning it* with sharp nails and even sharper teeth.

But this time, Hannibal actively handed it to him, almost like an offering.

And Will doesn’t quite know what to think of it. A self-respecting apex predator wouldn’t just bare their neck to another alpha - it goes against the natural order of things. The only reason a beast like Hannibal would behave against his nature is if his need for a lifelong mate

was greater than his hunger for flesh and blood. Such a shift in priorities makes Will's head spin with the sheer gravity of what Hannibal's behaviour means.

What it means for *them*.

He lies back down on the bed, deciding to tackle the topic later when he's more awake, more caffeinated, and more ready to process the implications of this revelation. That might not be until later in the day. Or maybe next week. Or next month. Or realistically, until he absolutely can't postpone it any longer.

"In my defense, you almost gave me blue balls by taking so long perusing your suit collection," Will resorts to saying.

Hannibal settles back into bed, half-sitting up against the pillows, and covers his pelvis with a sheet in a tastefully elegant manner.

"And ultimately, it led to an outcome we were both pleased with."

Will rolls his eyes at him, half-incredulous and half-annoyed, reluctantly admitting he's right. However, he can't resist shifting closer and placing his head on Hannibal's lap.

"When I say you're unpredictable, I'm not talking about just the bedroom," Hannibal continues, carding a hand through Will's messy mop of hair and winding one curly lock around his finger.

As the sleepiness slowly wears off, it's replaced by curiosity regarding what Hannibal means. Will lifts his gaze to the ceiling and hums, interest picking up rapidly.

"How so?"

"Your temperament is turbulent like the weather before a storm. Calm one moment and fierce the next."

Will entertains the thought for a moment. In the time he has known Hannibal, he has gone through the full spectrum of human emotions, forwards and backwards, inside and out. He's oscillated between preserving peace and waging war. Reverent appreciation and vitriolic hatred. Blinding rage and heartfelt affection. Wanting to punch Hannibal in the face and simultaneously wanting to kiss him.

"It's hard to act predictable when our relationship is what it is," Will says at last, eyes still fixed to the ceiling. His tone isn't bitter or blaming, just simply stating facts.

"What do you think our relationship is, Will?"

"I dunno. *This*."

The older man tilts his face down to look at Will, his mildly amused expression inviting Will to elaborate. Will shrugs again, shoulder poking the side of Hannibal's thigh.

Although they've known each other less than a year, it feels like they've experienced several lifetimes' worth of ups and downs. There's been verbal arguments, fist fights, telling lies, keeping secrets, mutual lack of trust, and well... sending killers after each other. But at the same time, they have been vulnerable with each other, shared painful moments from their past, cared for one another's injuries, and protected each other. Killed for each other, even. Even though there is a certain kind of balance to things, such as equal measures of tenderness and loathing, what they have can in no way be described as a typical relationship.

"It's not very... normal," Will begins. "I mean, most people meet, then start talking, then go on a few casual dates, and then get together."

Will pauses and looks up, only to see Hannibal staring at him expectantly. The man tilts his head, as if he doesn't yet see the main point of what Will is trying to convey.

"The first time I met you, you *offered me a kidney from the guy you'd killed in front of my eyes.*"

Hannibal only blinks in response, apparently unfazed by the bizarreness of it.

"Yes, and after that, you accepted my invitation to dine together. From then on, our journey towards a proper relationship was quite in line with what you said 'most people' do, wasn't it?"

Will thinks back on the early days. Having frequent and decadent dinners at Hannibal's, then spectacular sex, then relaxing drinks and conversations by the fireplace. Those days were good. Great. *Happy*. But of course, he should've known then that happiness always comes with a price.

"And then you sent Mason Verger's henchman after me."

A small spark of ire flashes in Will's eyes as he meets Hannibal's gaze. Not strong enough to start an argument, but prominent enough to let the other man know that Will still hasn't truly forgiven him for that stunt.

Hannibal smiles back at him, tranquil and unperturbed. His hand in Will's hair moves to swipe over his forehead, brushing the unruly curls away.

"Only because you rejected my proposition that was less drastic," he says. "You cannot accuse me for not trying a milder approach first."

"Your 'less drastic' proposition was for me to blow a guy's head off just because it *excites* you. It was a little too weird of a request straight off the bat," Will counters, then sighs. "But you really don't take no for an answer, do you?"

Hannibal's smile widens a little, now coloured with a shade of pride. *Smug bastard*. Still, Will can't help but nuzzle the man's leg with the side of his face.

"No, I don't."

Will slaps Hannibal's cheek, with considerably less force than the night before but definitely with considerably more of a reason. Hannibal's infuriating brand of persistence isn't something to be proud of.

"See, that's part of the problem," Will goes on, his voice assertive and insistent. "It's not just me being 'temperamental', it's me responding to the fuckery you pull."

"It *does* take two to tango," Hannibal concedes.

Will props himself on one arm, lifting his head off the other man's lap so that they can face each other properly. His tone is light, but there is a warning in his eyes. Yes, Hannibal sent Verger's man after Will, just to watch him kill. But in retaliation, Will sent a man after Hannibal at the opera.

He interlocks his eyes with Hannibal's. "You wind me up, I hit back."

Hannibal's pupils dilate at that, filling with an intense brew of emotions so tightly tangled Will can't immediately make sense of it. Not until Hannibal leans down and presses a kiss to his lips.

The man gets off on danger. He isn't interested in romance unless it comes laced with a little violence.

"I can take a hit," Hannibal promises in a low half-whisper half-purr.

A pleasant shiver runs through Will as he licks his lips, lapping up the sweet aftertaste of the kiss. Trying to have a serious conversation is proving to be difficult when his traitorous mind keeps interpreting Hannibal's responses as seduction. *Goddamn it.*

"But is it necessary? For you to have to take hits," Will asks, setting his head back down on Hannibal's thighs.

"I believe the outcome of that particular situation was mutually beneficial. I did take care of the bodyguard that stood between you and your target, after all."

"I guess. You're still fucking hopeless at handling rejection, though." Will pokes the other man in the stomach. "The roses, *seriously Hannibal?*"

Hannibal purses his lips in an exaggeratedly theatrical fashion. On anyone else, it would look silly, but on Hannibal, it makes him look ethereal and majestic like a biblical fresco of a weeping man. As much as Will can't stand Hannibal's pretentiousness sometimes, he also can't help but feel enamoured by the man.

"Your refusal to dine with me again upset me so, darling," Hannibal laments. As if Will killed his firstborn or something like that.

Will *snorts*. "You are *so* fucked up."

"Only as much as you."

“Doubt it.”

Hannibal’s finger tucks under Will’s chin and angles his head so that it becomes impossible to face away.

“I wasn’t the one who came to the other’s office waving a gun,” Hannibal points out.

“You didn’t seem particularly disturbed by it.”

Without breaking eye contact, Will’s fingers wrap around Hannibal’s wrist and bring it away from his chin.

“No, I wasn’t,” Hannibal hums, interlacing their fingers together.

Will’s eyes narrow in a playful challenge. “It’s ‘cause you have a thing for guns.”

“I most certainly don’t.”

Will uses their joined hands to pull himself into a sitting position, thighs spread on either side of Hannibal’s legs. The motion pulls down the sheet covering Hannibal’s crotch, so now, the thin material of Will’s underwear is the only barrier separating them. Will presses his other hand to the headboard of the bed to brace his weight, and leans closer to the other man. So close that the tips of their noses almost brush each other.

“You’re most certainly a *liar*,” he whispers.

“What is the point you’re trying to make?”

Hannibal’s tone is just as light and carefree as the little kiss he gives to the tip of Will’s nose. At the same time, he rolls his hips, sending a spark of pleasure right to Will’s groin. Will shifts back with a reluctant groan, moving to sit beside the older man rather than on his lap. They’re finally talking about things, having a conversation that is long overdue. As such, it wouldn’t be wise to allow himself to get distracted by Hannibal’s alluring body.

In fact, now Will starts to wonder if their approach to the conversation, especially Hannibal’s, has been too casual so far. It’s clear that they both still have unresolved feelings about some of the things that transpired between them. But instead, they have danced through the topic with lighthearted nonchalance, silly humour, and a flirtatious undercurrent, and thus, downplayed the importance of those unresolved feelings. Deep inside, Will knows that what they should be having instead is a more serious discussion of boundaries and expectations of their relationship. Proper communication and all.

Will studies his partner with a thoughtful frown. Hannibal is either not getting it, or pretending that he isn’t getting it. Either way, it leaves Will with no other choice but to break it down to him. No more dancing around. No more distractions.

“You *push* me into unpredictable situations, Hannibal. Which causes me to give unpredictable responses. You can’t judge the effect without considering the cause.” Will scratches the back of his neck, eyes still on the other man. “Hell, sometimes it feels like you’re doing it on pur-”

Will cuts himself off. He blinks. Once, twice. Opens his mouth, then closes it.

“Wait. That's *exactly* what you're doing.”

Hannibal inclines his head, regarding Will with an impressed and pleased look. As if this is a guessing game and Will is getting into the ‘warmer’ territory.

And god, Will wants to slap him for that. Slap him hard. Because this isn't a game. The only reason Will's hand doesn't move is because it dawns on him that he's realised something groundbreaking. He's finally found the precious thread which, once pulled hard enough, will unravel every problem they've had so far.

So, Will pulls. And the result is a discovery that feels ridiculously obvious now that he's aware of it.

Pushing Will is exactly what Hannibal is doing, and he's doing it *on purpose*. He isn't interested in maintaining Will's state of calm. He is interested in making Will embody the *storm*. He wants to see Will's possessive jealousy and unhinged violence.

Will looks at him, no longer puzzled by the ‘what’, but now confused as to ‘why’.

“The only way for me to meet the enticing sea of your attention, Will, is if I raise the tide myself,” the man says, tone almost dreamy.

Will's first instinct is to quip at him to stop with the stupid and overly cryptic metaphors. But then, the words sink in. And when they do, they render Will speechless.

Hannibal craves his attention.

Because in attention, there is affection. And Hannibal, a man whose mind works so differently from others', derives affection from being treated like an enemy just as much as from being treated like a lover.

Will averts his eyes, the earth-shattering significance of his revelation making the eye contact between them too intense to endure. He twists his fingers in his lap and gnaws on his lip.

“You want more attention from me. Or more so, *affection*. So, you feel compelled to evoke it yourself,” he says then, each word forming slowly on his lips. “Is that what the problem is, Hannibal?”

When Will finally dares to shoot a quick glance in the direction of Hannibal's face, he finds the other man's gaze focused elsewhere. On the bed, on the floor, anywhere but on Will. Hannibal Lecter, who is never out of depth with anything, is now appearing hesitant and guarded. Unsure of how to navigate the very storm he's caused himself.

“You certainly have a reserved personality, with many mental forts to protect your brilliant mind,” he tells Will at last.

So, yes, then. Will, who has become accustomed to decoding Hannibal's convoluted language, understands this to mean that Hannibal wishes Will treated him with more care and

fondness than before.

Will exhales, his mind switching gears and heading into overdrive.

He's never been good at giving affection, which isn't surprising. His experience with romantic relationships has been minimal, and the same could be said about close friendships. Besides, being raised by a single father, who was a 'tough love' kind of parent more than the coddling type, means Will's opportunities for learning and practising how to be caring and loving have been quite scarce.

Another thing that plays a major role in his unwillingness to jump into close relationships is trust. And trust has never come easily to Will. As Hannibal pointed out, he has a reserved personality, and when coupled with the secretive nature of his job, it makes it both difficult and dangerous to open up to people. So perhaps, trust issues are the real reason he has been more closed-off towards Hannibal than the man hoped for.

Then again, Hannibal is a killer living a double life too, so he must understand exactly why men like them can't be too careful about who they trust. There is a reason they progressed quickly to the stage of sleeping together, whereas deeper attachment and genuine feelings took longer to develop. It's no wonder they both felt hesitant to go further than the no-strings-attached stage, where Will came over for dinner and *dessert*, but never stayed the night.

The thing is, Will never stayed because he was afraid it would be too much too fast. Because he didn't think it was something Hannibal wanted. Because Hannibal never offered.

And it's only now that Will thinks about it from the opposite perspective. Maybe Hannibal never brought up Will staying the night because Will never made the first move to ask. Maybe he thought Will wasn't interested in having something more. Because Will didn't show clearly enough that he likes Hannibal as more than just a partner for casual sex.

Will understands now that they both wanted the same thing there, but neither was brave enough to take the next step. They are hopeless at communication, and have been throughout their relationship, which Will now realises is the main cause of all the frustration and fights they've had. And not only that, but their lack of proper communication has also cost lives. Will thinks back to those Verger men that Hannibal slaughtered in his quest to protect Will. He doesn't particularly care for their lives, but they were still people that died as collateral damage because the two of them *can't fucking communicate*.

Whatever is going on between them is not just a dysfunctional relationship, but a whole goddamn natural disaster.

"You provoke me on purpose, because when I'm angry or jealous, it shows you that I care," Will says slowly, previous guesswork solidifying into a concrete conclusion.

The whole mess with Antony Dimmond starts to make sense now, too. Specifically, Hannibal's motivations for lying about sleeping with him. What Hannibal wanted was to make Will jealous, which in turn forced Will to be more open and direct about his feelings for Hannibal. To make it clear that he wanted Hannibal as an exclusive partner, not just a casual hook-up. Things had ultimately worked out in their favour, like Hannibal had planned, ending

with them entering a proper relationship. However, what he most likely failed to predict was that his manipulations prompted Will to sleep with Antony for no reason, which undoubtedly left a sour taste in both their mouths.

All of this could have been avoided if Hannibal had just simply expressed wanting to be exclusive to Will. Not in riddles, but in simple and direct words.

Will sighs and rubs his temples. For a psychiatrist, Hannibal sure is unbelievably clueless at how interpersonal communication works.

“I know I’m not the best at showing my feelings, but you’ve got to stop forcing them out of me with your manipulations. It’s making things worse, Hannibal. There are other, less damaging ways to ask for what you need, you know?”

Hannibal smiles at him, unperturbed, serene and enthralled. As if Will is the eighth wonder of the world and Hannibal is a humble explorer who’s suddenly stumbled upon it. As if Will’s exasperation is an artwork in a museum to be marvelled at, not an actual human need to be met.

“I am aware, dear.”

Will’s bluish-green eyes flick up to meet the honey-coloured pair, equally incredulous and irritated. He is not a toy whose emotional states are for others to gawk at, not an object designed for other people’s amusement and entertainment.

“Then why do you keep doing this!?” Will exclaims, voice rising in volume. He roughly slams the headboard between them with the palm of his hand, causing the entire bed to shake. “Your stupid manipulation tactics are why this relationship is *not fucking working*. ”

Will spits the last words out with perhaps more force and venom than warranted. But at least, it has an effect on Hannibal. His expression shifts, a small frown appearing between his brows and a pensive glaze clouding his eyes. He looks like he’s been struck. Not physically, but emotionally.

Will waits with bated breath.

“I am pleased that we’ve been able to talk about this and shine some light onto our respective motivations and shortcomings. I’m certain that things will be easier now, moving forward,” Hannibal says, pursing his lips.

His tone is calm and diplomatic, something that would be used to settle arguments. All Will does in response is narrow his eyes, not feeling reassured in the slightest.

“That’s all you have to say?” he questions.

“For now, yes. What else is bothering you?”

“I don’t want to have to be a fucking oracle, Hannibal,” Will huffs, annoyance still brewing in his gut. “I don’t want to be guessing what it is that you want from me.”

“Your deductions have been correct so far. As I said before, you have a brilliant mind.”

Hannibal leans in and raises a hand to cup Will’s cheek, in what seems to be a placating gesture of peace. In his mind, at least. To Will, it feels like an ill-timed attempt at dismissing his rightful concerns. The kind of “yes honey, whatever you want” treatment a husband would give his annoying wife just so she’d shut up.

Will scowls and pushes Hannibal away.

“No, Hannibal, you’re not listening,” he grits out, patience running thin. “I don’t want to have to *deduce* things. I want you to communicate with me directly.”

Before the older man has the chance to respond with more pacifying bullshit, Will grabs him by the chin. He squeezes hard with his fingers, not giving Hannibal no room to twist away, or even to avert his eyes.

“Tell me what you want from me, in words. Not by pushing me until I snap,” Will practically growls.

Hannibal’s pupils widen in surprise, just a little. The gaze in them, however, remains largely calm.

“Alright, Will. I can do that.”

From up close like this, Will can see the man genuinely cares about him. But that doesn’t help make Will feel less infuriated by his dismissive and superficial attitude.

“I mean now. Tell me what you want from me. From this relationship.”

Hannibal casts his eyes down and licks his lips, likely contemplating how to put into words what he wants to say. Will can tell clearly that much like himself, Hannibal isn’t good at talking about his feelings. Specifically, his need for attention and affection. More than likely because he doesn’t want to appear weak or vulnerable, which Will can definitely understand and personally relate to. But now that he has finally wrung this admission out of Hannibal like a drop of water from a barely damp sponge, he isn’t going to stop until he gets all the answers that he needs. That is, clarity and understanding regarding their issues, and how to move past them.

Will allows Hannibal a minute to think, but his hand gripping the man’s chin stays firmly in place, for now.

“I would like more nights like our dinner date at *La Primavera*,” Hannibal tells him at last. “I enjoyed it tremendously.”

Will nods. This isn’t as direct of an answer as he was hoping, but direct enough. Will understands that this is Hannibal’s way of saying that he would like more romantic activities to do as a couple. The grip of his hand loosens, but doesn’t release Hannibal just yet.

“What about it, exactly?” Will prompts.

“It pleases me immensely to know that you took the time to find a restaurant that I like, reserved a table for us, and otherwise ensured that we would have a perfect evening.”

Will hums in approval, fingers trailing up to trace the shape of Hannibal’s cheekbone. He isn’t fully satisfied, but he’s getting there. Hannibal is *trying*, and that’s what matters. Will decides to cut the man some slack.

“I’m glad you liked it. I put a lot of thought into it.”

“I can see that, and I appreciate it. But next time, I would appreciate it more if you told me that you booked it yourself, rather than fabricating a story about winning a lottery.” Hannibal looks up at him again, the fondness in his eyes diluted with a little bit of hurt. “It dampens the meaning behind your lovely gesture.”

Will bites his lip, realising his mistake. He was worried about coming across as too strong or romantic with the dinner date, and feared Hannibal wouldn’t like it. But to Hannibal, he came across as not caring enough. Now it’s easy for Will to see why that upset his partner.

“Okay yeah, my bad,” he admits, pulling back and resuming his position sitting by Hannibal’s side.

“It’s nothing you can’t fix with a timely do-over,” Hannibal assures him with a warm smile. “You may find it useful to know that I’m particularly fond of Japanese cuisine.”

Will matches his smile. This time, when Hannibal’s hand finds its place at the nape of his neck, he doesn’t push it away.

“Noted. But only after you fix your fuck-ups.”

“And how do you propose I do that?” Hannibal asks, his usual unrestrained amusement intentionally dulled down with some humbleness. Not wanting to aggravate Will further.

Will thinks about it for a moment. He has to admit that it’s far more difficult to think of ways to solve and mend things, than to simply seek revenge and retaliate.

“You can give me roses,” he suggests. “But be appropriate about it this time.”

The expression on Hannibal’s face looks deeply pleased, like a large cat lounging in the sun. Will guesses he’s happy because of how easily he’s gotten off the hook, but also because this means he can continue astounding Will with his creative and unexpected gifts. Right now, Hannibal is probably contemplating how he can be ‘appropriate’ with the flowers, yet still extravagant and eccentric in his typical Hannibal-esque way. Maybe he’ll surprise Will with a bouquet of pitch-black roses. Or maybe gold-plated. Or something ridiculously ostentatious like that, to showcase his boundless wealth and his equally boundless dark desires.

Will’s mouth stretches into a devious grin. Does Hannibal really think he will be let off that easily?

“Oh and,” he purrs, closing the distance between them to mouth at Hannibal’s flawlessly-shaped jawbone, “you have to promise me something.”

“Hmm?”

Hannibal’s low hum makes his jaw vibrate, and Will can feel it against his lips.

“You have to promise not to push me on purpose. And in return, I’ll promise to be more open about my feelings for you. Do we have a deal?”

“Yes, we do.” Hannibal’s hand settles on Will’s lower back, keeping him close. Not like a prized possession, but rather like a partner worth cherishing. “Is there anything else you’d like?”

Will’s smirk stretches wider.

“Well, since you asked. One million dollars worth of gifts every month, and a luxury vacation to Paris,” he drawls, putting on his best impression of a spoiled sugar baby making demands.

Anyone that isn’t Hannibal Lecter would have treated Will’s absurd request as an obvious joke, which is exactly what it is. But of course, Will’s boyfriend, who just happens to be Hannibal Lecter, looks like he is considering it, at least half-seriously. Contemplating if he could actually manage it. Possibly even asking himself the question of whether this ludicrous quest would be easier to pull off than his promise of not provoking Will.

“If you are serious, I can arrange that. I have a property in Paris, which is currently serving as a safehouse in case my safety here is ever threatened,” Hannibal tells him.

Because of course he has a fucking house in Paris. Probably one with a view of the Eiffel tower too. Will has never been on a real international vacation, especially not one with a partner. So far, his life has been as far from romance as humanly possible. Will can’t deny, however, that spending a week or two simply lounging in a prestigious apartment, doing nothing but enjoying each other’s company, sounds extremely appealing. As long as they work on other aspects of their newly-started relationship, too.

He narrows his eyes at Hannibal, regarding him with a somewhat skeptical expression. Telling the older man that he is in fact *not* a spoiled baby, and won’t be easily influenced by promises of a romantic getaway. Hannibal will have to do some real work if he wants their life together to run smoothly. They will both have to.

“Nuh-uh. Worry about the flowers and the promise first.”

“Quite right,” Hannibal acquiesces with a pleased smile. “Paris will always be there for us.”

It’s nice to dream sometimes. But eventually, they have to go back to their daily grind. Will has his hitman business to run, clients to respond to, murders to plan. But that doesn’t mean that he can’t delay his work by another hour or so to take a long and relaxing shower.

“Yeah, Paris will always be there for us,” he echoes absent-mindedly. “I’m going to shower, and you should definitely, absolutely, strictly *not* join me, under any circumstance.”

He gives Hannibal a wink as he goes, both of them knowing exactly how much Will enjoys a good lovemaking session under the steaming spray. Without waiting for a response, he

saunters towards the ensuite bathroom. And if there is more swing to his hips and more smile to his lips than usual, then that's definitely, *definitely* not on purpose.

Chapter End Notes

Still no killing Bedelia in this chapter, but some relationship development was needed. Things are looking up for them right now, but trust me when I say this - this story is FAR from being done!

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

“Like I said before, I’m not up for negotiation,” Will says once Hannibal is out of earshot.

Even feeling terrified to the bone, Bedelia manages to give him a condescending and disdainful look. “What are you planning?”

Will only smiles wider in response.

Chapter Notes

The dinner with Bedelia is finally here! But before that, Will and Hannibal have a conversation about spicing up their love life.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will’s fingers drum against the pristine black marble countertop in Hannibal’s kitchen. He’s been acting as the sous-chef for the older man for the past hour, helping with meal preparation and making sure the dinner goes flawlessly. Everything must be perfect. It is Bedelia Du Maurier’s last supper, after all.

“Feeling impatient?” Hannibal asks, noticing Will’s nervous fidgeting.

“Very.”

“I could say the same about myself. Tonight is an important night.”

Hannibal’s choice of clothing certainly supports the statement. The black suit with white vertical stripes isn’t an unusual choice considering his proclivity for dressing formally even to casual occasions, but Will has noticed a few new accessories that aren’t part of his everyday wear. Hannibal’s cufflinks are silver with shiny black onyx stones in the middle, a big contrast to the more modest metal cufflinks he typically uses. In addition to that, Hannibal is wearing a black bowtie, which in itself is a sign of the significance of the dinner. Will hasn’t seen the man wear a bowtie anywhere other than the opera.

The outfit is just an inch short of being a full tuxedo. Will finds himself disdainfully thinking Bedelia isn’t important enough for Hannibal to doll himself up like that for. But then, he

remembers that she isn't really a guest of honour, but a prop. Because the show isn't for her. It's for Will. He has the front row seat to watch her demise.

Hannibal's suit jacket has remained on the hanger until now, as he didn't want to risk getting it dirty while cooking. Will almost wishes Hannibal never puts it on and stays in just the pearly-white dress shirt he's wearing right now. The sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, and Will wants them to remain like that all night so that he can see blood stick to Hannibal's bare forearms. He wants to see the thin material of the shirt get stained crimson-red, making it cling to Hannibal's chest.

The older man must have noticed the heat in Will's stare, because he pauses stirring the sauce he's making in favour of looking at Will.

"Tell me something, Will."

"Hmm?"

"What part of this night excites you the most?"

Will raises his brows at the unexpected question. The right answer doesn't come to him straight away. Is it the justice they're bringing Bedelia for making an attempt on Hannibal's life? Is it the murder itself, the spilling of her blood all over the white tablecloth? Or is it watching Hannibal commit the gruesome act; witnessing the ruthlessness of his lover in his full glory?

The thing is, Will hasn't yet been able to watch Hannibal kill from a close distance. He observed from afar when Hannibal slayed a man at the dock, which was the first time Will laid eyes on him. And he witnessed the aftermath of Hannibal stabbing a guy to death with just a ballpoint pen. But he hasn't yet had the privilege of being an active participant in any of Hannibal's kills.

The glimpses that he has seen spoke of ungodly elegance. Cutting through flesh and bone with the same ease one cuts through ripe fruit. Turning blood and breath into simple elements fuelling his radiance. Transforming murder into art. And today when Hannibal takes Bedelia's life, instead of feeling disgusted or petrified, Will is going to look at him *in awe*.

"It's the violence," Will settles on saying, tongue darting out to wet his lips without conscious thought. "The intimacy of it."

When Hannibal looks at him, his pupils are like an ever-expanding black hole, attracting Will like a magnet and swallowing him whole. When he rounds the kitchen island and takes a step towards Will, Will finds himself automatically gravitating forward, closing the distance between them.

"You live for the thrill that a hunt brings. For the anticipation, the intrigue, and the deadly passion."

Hannibal's words are like a spell, finding its way into every cell of Will's body and filling it with exhilaration so vivid that it feels electric. And Will, completely overtaken by the

sensation, can only nod in response. Hannibal knows him the way no one else does, on a level that transcends simple intimacy. He knows what fuels Will's bones and nourishes his soul. And Will knows that those same things sustain Hannibal too.

They both like to flirt with danger and violence just as much as flirting with each other. It's why they've willingly chosen to intertwine their lives with killing, be it a hobby or an occupation. It's why Will's heart beats a little faster when he so much as thinks about seeing Hannibal covered in the blood of his victims.

"Yes. And I gave up trying to hide it long ago," Will whispers back.

He could have had a normal life. He could have had a normal job as a boat mechanic or a dog trainer. But he didn't, and he knows exactly why that is. From a young age, Will could tell he wasn't like everyone else. There has always been a part of him that embraced madness and found solace in the darkest traits of humanity.

Will steps closer, close enough to touch. And touch he does. He runs his hand down Hannibal's chest, feeling the outline of the man's refined muscles underneath his palm.

Hannibal tilts his head, looking at him evaluatively. "You expressed a desire for our life together to be more like that of traditional couples. Safe and mundane."

"I did."

"Yet, I've never seen you more invigorated than today, in anticipation of bloodletting," Hannibal points out. It's as if he's a demon that can read Will's mind with incredible ease and accuracy. "With the way that our unique natures are, don't you think that your proposed 'normalcy' would feel like a shackle holding us back?"

Will bites his lip and averts his eyes. Hannibal is right, and they both know it. Neither of them is built for a life that requires them to keep parts of themselves hidden. The endless game of cat and mouse they've engaged in since their first meeting is nobody's fault but their own. And they keep perpetuating it not because they feel like they have to, but because deep down, they both enjoy it.

Will sighs and rests his forehead against Hannibal's shoulder, realising the paradoxical nature of what he wants. He wants to live dangerously, but he also doesn't.

"Today is an exception," he says tentatively.

Bedelia is a risk to their safety, and thus must be dealt with immediately.

"And what if it isn't? Your job doesn't come without significant risks, and neither do my pastime activities."

Will knows that. He's been keeping a gun in his bedside drawer since he became a hitman. It's taken a lot of time, and even more courage and guts, to establish himself in the field, so he doesn't want to quit. He can handle the risk and the stress of his job, but having Hannibal push his buttons on top of that is what's threatening to drive Will mad. He needs a secure and

stable love life to balance out the demanding nature of running a hitman business. Work-life balance, or something like that.

“I’d like killing to be separate from our love life,” Will explains. *No more sending killers after each other.* “We can find other ways to keep things exciting.”

He doesn’t want their relationship to revolve around gambling with their lives, but that doesn’t mean it has to be boring or mundane. Surely they can think of something that would give them the right kind of thrill without being overly risky and destructive.

“May I ask what you have in mind?” Hannibal enquires, curiosity piqued now.

“Well, that’s the part I haven’t figured out yet,” Will admits with a small chuckle.

Hannibal hums contemplatively. Will can see a twinkle in his eye, signalling that he has some ideas.

“You enjoy biting and marking,” the older man says, more of a statement than a question.

Before Will has the chance to reply, he feels Hannibal’s mouth on his neck, nipping the sensitive skin with his teeth. He can’t help but let out a high-pitched moan in surprise. If anything, that suggests to them both that he indeed likes biting, both giving and receiving it.

Hannibal’s breath tickles the side of his throat. “Let me offer a suggestion.”

Will pulls back just enough to be able to see his partner’s face, interested to hear him out.

“It’s not uncommon for couples that want excitement in their lives to experiment with various things and dynamics in the bedroom.”

Will raises an eyebrow. How did he not see where Hannibal was going with this?

“You’re suggesting... BDSM,” he deduces, skepticism evident in his voice.

Hannibal blinks, unperturbed.

“If you aren’t comfortable with that idea, you only need to say so.”

“No, it’s not that.” Will pauses and gnaws on his lip, turning the concept over in his mind. “I just haven’t considered it before.”

What Hannibal is proposing is a whole different kind of sadism and violence. More controlled, less damaging. More sustainable in the long run. Will nods, preliminarily interested.

“If you ask me to handcuff you I’ll immediately nope out,” he adds, jokingly stern.

Being a cop means Will’s had more than his fair share of handcuffing people, for real. And it was as far from sexy as humanly possible. So, doing this in the bedroom would feel way too weird. Too resemblant of his old day job to be a fun and kinky activity to do with his partner.

An amused half-smile lights up Hannibal's face at that. "If you'd prefer to rather be on the receiving end of the experience, it certainly won't be a problem."

His fingers trail slowly along Will's forearm, from elbow to hand. Then, in a motion that is smooth to the point of appearing *well-practised*, they wrap around Will's wrist.

Will draws in a surprised breath. Then, his hand twists out of the grip and captures Hannibal's wrist in return, much firmer.

"You should be careful about making assumptions like that," he warns Hannibal, low and dangerous.

Will pins the older man's hand to the countertop, arm-wrestling style. Something flashes behind Hannibal's eyes, and he takes a step forward, forcing Will to back into the corner between two counters. Will's breath hitches as their chests press flush against each other. But Hannibal doesn't stop there. He pushes further, causing Will's back to bend backwards over the countertop. Lips brush the shell of Will's ear, feather-light yet branding-hot.

"Switching is an option," Hannibal whispers. "You may, and I very much think you *will*, discover many things and dynamics you didn't think you'd enjoy."

Will feels himself flush, the heat radiating from Hannibal's voice going straight to his groin. His eyes slip closed of their own accord, and he tilts his head to nuzzle the tip of his nose against Hannibal's cheek. He doesn't dare try anything else out of fear of getting carried away. Hannibal's magnetic pull is almost impossible to resist, but Bedelia is due to arrive soon so they must remain composed. Reluctantly, Will twists away from between Hannibal and the counter.

"I'll think about it, okay?" he promises and pecks the other man on the lips.

Getting involved in kink play with an established serial killer sounds like an all-round terrible idea. But at the same time, it sounds like an idea that Will's adventurous nature can't resist. They've engaged in far more dangerous things before. So in comparison, a little bit of sadomasochism in the bedroom doesn't seem so bad.

They can explore it slowly. Experiment. Ease into it. Establish their limits and boundaries, or whatever else this kind of thing entails. All in due time. For now, they will focus on what they're both much more experienced in; getting rid of the woman who is threatening their future together.

When the doorbell rings to announce Bedelia's arrival, Will feels like the chiming sound is vibrating through his very bones. He decides to hide in the kitchen while Hannibal answers

the door. It's only after the woman is brought inside and the door securely locked behind her that Will is going to make his entrance.

It's going to be more dramatic that way, and Will is going to get to watch blood slowly drain from Bedelia's face as she realises just how royally she has fucked up. Will can't wait, but he forces himself to take his time in the kitchen, sipping his martini that Hannibal has prepared. He even eats the olives off the toothpick garnishing the drink. They burst under his teeth, just the way he imagines Bedelia's blood vessels will burst under Hannibal's blade.

Once the sounds of her and Hannibal talking can be heard closer to the dining area, Will picks up Bedelia and Hannibal's martini glasses and slowly heads in. As soon as he rounds the corner separating the dinner table from the kitchen, he immediately locks eyes with the poor woman. Recognition flashes in her eyes, making her pupils dilate and her back straighten. But apart from that, she manages to maintain her composure. If Will didn't hate her guts, he would've applauded her bravery.

He settles on approaching her in an unhurried but menacing fashion, the way a wild animal approaches its cornered prey.

"I'm Will Graham," he greets her, his tone low and sweet, "I don't believe we've met before."

"No, we haven't."

The pitch of her voice is controlled, overcontrolled even, to the point where it's taut like a string that's been stretched to its breaking point. Will licks his lips, wondering how much more it will take for it to break.

He puts the drinks aside to shake Bedelia's hand. As he does so, he holds on a little too long, the strong grasp of his fingers lingering around her smaller hand, almost crushing. To remind her that although he and Hannibal are dressed as gentlemen, very soon the beasts will come out to play.

"Will owns a private boat servicing business in Virginia," Hannibal informs her in the voice of a cheerful host.

Of course, out of all things in the world, what makes Hannibal Lecter feel genuinely cheerful is anticipating a murder in his own dining room. Will suppresses an eye roll.

"You make it sound way more glamorous than it is. Most of my work takes place in my shed, elbow-deep in motor grease."

Will hands Bedelia her martini, which she gingerly accepts. Hannibal immediately takes a sip of his, but Bedelia hesitates to mirror his actions. Will can see why. Contrary to what she thinks, the content of her drink is exactly the same as Will and Hannibal's. It would be no fun to dull her fear with drugs. As much as Hannibal insists that a frightful death makes the victim's meat taste sour, Will wants to draw out Bedelia's misery as much as possible.

"In that case, I am curious as to how you met," she says.

It seems like an innocuous comment, but Will can easily see the underlying assumptions at the base of it. What she really means is how does a prestigious man like Hannibal fall for a dirty working class mechanic who probably can't tell a salad fork from a cake fork? The temptation to tell Bedelia to shove her classist attitudes in her uppity ass is almost unbearable. However, if Will drops his act, Bedelia will know that Hannibal is in on the plan. For now, he wants to keep her in the dark. Keep her *afraid*.

"Well, I was working on a dock and Hannibal was passing by," Will tells her. "He immediately caught my attention."

It's not the full truth, but not really a lie either. Will knows he can be honest with Bedelia since she knows all about what he does for a living. But it's much more fun to pretend that he's obfuscating things for Hannibal's sake.

"Needless to say, Will captured my attention just as much," Hannibal adds, coming up next to Will and placing a hand on his back. "Shall we begin? The food is ready to be served."

The table is already set, the white tablecloth making the occasion feel more festive in comparison to other dinners Hannibal hosts. The place settings, consisting of three sets of forks and knives and two glasses per person, are all congregated at one end of the table. Hannibal's seat is at the head of it as the host. He has allocated a place for Bedelia on his right as the guest of honour — very ironically so, Will notes — and a place for Will on Hannibal's left, opposite Bedelia. The sitting arrangement is perfect, allowing Will an unrestricted view of Bedelia. It's like having a gold-class ticket to a gore movie. He's going to have a lot of fun watching her squirm over the course of the night.

Judging by how much time and effort Hannibal put into preparing the meal, it's unlikely that he will touch Bedelia before she has finished all three courses. On the other hand though, Will doesn't put it past Hannibal to surprise them both and strike mid-meal, when Will and Bedelia least expect it. Will decides to watch Hannibal's every move so that he doesn't miss anything.

Hannibal leaves to fetch the first course, leaving Will to entertain their guest. He remains silent for the first minute or so, simply enjoying Bedelia's torment in silence. Her eyes scan the large room they're in, possibly looking for escape routes or things to use as weapons. In the end, all her attempts to defend herself will be futile, but it'll be more fun if she tries.

"I thought that as a psychiatrist, you would know that it's never a good idea to dine with a patient," Will says, practically goading in his chair.

Bedelia offers him a small smile, way too smug for his liking. "Then perhaps it's a good thing that Hannibal isn't formally my patient."

Ah, right. She has retired from formal psychiatric practice.

Will shrugs dismissively. "Technicalities."

"Currently, I'm more inclined to see Hannibal as a friend than a patient," Bedelia informs him in her infuriatingly drawling voice.

Will's eyes narrow. Something about the overly friendly way she acts towards Hannibal flips the jealousy switch inside Will. And it tastes sour on his tongue.

"A friend you've ordered a hit on," he snaps, possessive anger flashing behind his eyes. "You've dug your own grave, Bedelia."

She purses her perfectly-outlined lips that are the exact same dark pink shade as her blouse and averts his eyes. An admission of a miscalculation on her part; an artificial image of regret. Her lack of genuineness is *nauseating*.

When Bedelia meets Will's eyes again, the expression on her face has changed to hopeful and placating. Like she thinks she's in the position to negotiate.

"This unforeseen turn of events has brought us to an impasse, Mr. Graham."

Will snorts. It's both funny and infuriating to watch her trade her cocky demeanour for a friendly one in the space of a few seconds. Trying to elicit sympathy from Will, whatever it takes. Right now, she's willing to do anything to wiggle her way out of this, knowing that the odds are against her.

However, Will's face remains stone-cold. "I don't see how we can put this behind us, if that's what you're suggesting."

"It would only be possible if this stays between you and me."

Will cocks an eyebrow. Bedelia wants to know if he has told Hannibal about their deal. She's undeniably hoping that Will isn't out as a hitman to Hannibal yet, and therefore can't tell him directly about what he knows. So, not only is she arrogant and full of herself, but she's also plain stupid.

Will sips his martini, unswayed by her attempts at a conflict-free resolution.

"With the information that we know about each other, we have the potential to cause irreparable damage to each other's lives," Bedelia points out. She's stuck on a ship in the middle of the ocean and that ship is sinking fast. "To preserve peace, I am willing to pretend the transaction between us never happened."

Will looks at her with his most potent are-you-for-fucking-real glance. Blackmail dressed as mutual aid? The audacity of this woman is unbelievable. Will doesn't doubt that Bedelia's promise of secrecy will dissipate the second she is safely out the door. If they let her go, the first thing she'll do is go to the cops and expose both Will and Hannibal as killers. Because knowing Bedelia's scheming nature, she must have evidence prepared that will get them behind bars while painting herself as innocent.

"A compelling offer," Will sneers, looking her in the eye with a wolvisish grin, "however, there are other ways for me to preserve peace."

Bedelia's eyes widen at that, but before she gets to say anything, Hannibal comes back with three plates of the appetizer course. On each plate, there are three different mouth-watering

creations.

“For entrée, I have prepared a seafood platter for each of us. Deviled eggs with smoked salmon and dill, oysters Rockefeller, and prawn tartlets with cream cheese.”

When he comes close to Bedelia to place the plate in front of her, Will notices her tense up and lean away from him, undeniably scared. It’s a very subtle movement, but it doesn’t escape Will’s watchful eyes. He is sure Hannibal noticed too but pretended that he didn’t. To keep the game going, for now.

Hannibal’s cooking tastes divine, as always, but instead getting lost in the wonderful artisanal collection of flavours on his tongue, Will finds himself preoccupied with the hunt. As he expected, nothing happens during the first course. They engage in mind-numbing chit chat until everyone’s plate is mostly empty. Although all three of them are acting cheerful and carefree, the underlying tension in the room is more than obvious.

Since the appetizer was all seafood, Will is more than certain the main course will be meat. He wonders if Hannibal will reveal to Bedelia where the meat has come from, now that they know she will take that information to her grave. Will imagines the utter shock and horror on her face when it’s revealed. Preferably, not until *after* she has eaten everything.

Hannibal moves to the far edge of the table, where he has stationed an array of cocktail-making supplies. He picks up an ice pick, a dangerous thing that looks like the child of a screwdriver and a thick needle, and begins chipping at a large block of ice. Both Will and Bedelia watch him collect the ice shavings into three glasses. Hannibal then combines rum, egg white, lemon juice and orange juice into a cocktail shaker.

“Punch romaine, an excellent palate cleanser between courses,” he announces before shaking the mixture. “And incidentally, also the drink that was served to first-class passengers on Titanic during their last dinner.”

His eyes find Bedelia’s as he speaks. Although his face shows nothing but neutral mirth, Will is sure the meaning of the drink isn’t lost on Bedelia. He struggles to stop himself from *snickering* out loud; Hannibal can be so damn obvious yet menacing in his foreshadowing. A predator playing with its prey.

“It must be a lovely cocktail since it was served in first class,” Bedelia comments, keeping her eyes on her plate.

Her voice is soft and airy, as if she wants to disappear without a trace. To be swept away by the unforgiving ocean. Will can’t blame her. Drowning after a collision with an iceberg sounds like a more merciful death than being the subject of whatever it is that Hannibal plans to do to her.

When Hannibal brings the finished cocktails over to them, Will notices that he didn’t see him putting down the ice pick. Perhaps, allowing poor Bedelia to partake in the main course isn’t on Hannibal’s agenda.

Anticipation skyrockets in Will as Hannibal slowly makes his way closer and closer. He hands the first drink to Will and then rounds the table to get to Bedelia. Will leans forward, not bothering to hide his unrestrained enthusiasm. It's *about to happen*, and he doesn't want to miss a second of it. If it makes Bedelia feel like an animal in a zoo cage, being gawked on by nosy visitors, then all the better. The only thing that's missing right now is popcorn.

Hannibal pauses just behind her, and from his position Will can see breath get caught in Bedelia's throat. She doesn't dare turn to look behind her. Doesn't dare move at all. Because she knows her end is coming, and there is nothing she can do to stop it.

Slowly, Hannibal's arm comes around her from behind, placing the punch romaine by her plate.

"Please, enjoy. I'll be just a moment."

As soon as the words leave Hannibal's mouth, he retracts his hand and straightens up, heading back to the kitchen.

Will and Bedelia both take a deep breath, although for two very different reasons. Relief floods Bedelia's face like a tidal wave, returning some colour onto her pale skin. In contrast, a lazy smirk appears on Will's face.

"Like I said before, I'm not up for negotiation," he says once Hannibal is out of earshot.

Even feeling terrified to the bone, Bedelia manages to give him a condescending and disdainful look. "What are you planning?"

Will only smiles wider in response.

Hannibal is back sooner than the first time, expertly balancing three large plates on his arms like a professional waiter.

"Loin served with a Cumberland sauce of red fruits," he announces, placing down the dishes and taking his seat.

"Your cooking is wonderful, as always," Bedelia comments in a small voice.

Hannibal smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes. "I believe that one should approach preparing and consuming every meal as if it were their last."

Bedelia chokes on her punch romaine. Will disguises his burst of laughter as a cough. Hannibal pretends not to notice either.

Boring conversation settles over the table again, accompanied by the sounds of cutlery against the plates. Will can tell Hannibal wouldn't attempt to kill Bedelia in the middle of eating a dish, but rather choose to do it between courses. He would consider it "disrespectful to the meal", or something like that. Bedelia seems to sense this too, judging by the way her posture relaxes over the course of the next fifteen minutes. The separate dishes feel like a temporary respite from the looming danger, like little islands of perceived safety. However, as the night goes on, Bedelia's demise gets closer and closer.

Once they have finished the loin, Hannibal makes another round of punch romaine, and predictably, collects the empty plates to take back to the kitchen and bring dessert. Will doesn't bother talking to Bedelia, and she returns the courtesy. He briefly wonders if she saw Hannibal pocket the ice pick. Then, he wonders if she came armed. When she came to dine with the man she's trying to have killed, she definitely wasn't expecting to also be dining with the assassin she's hired for the job. But regardless, she knows that Hannibal was involved in the death of their shared patient, so bringing a weapon would be wise.

Bedelia's outfit consisting of a dark pink blouse and a white pencil skirt doesn't seem to have any pockets, so Will's wild imagination presents him with a mental image of Bedelia with a pistol strapped to her upper thigh with a garter, hidden under the skirt. Like femme fatales in old action movies. Inconspicuous? Sure. Impractical? Hell yes.

Hannibal returns with what looks like cups of thick chocolate-coloured mousse. He serves Will first, then rounds the table to come to Bedelia, just like before. Slowly. Savouring every step, relishing in every moment. Drinking in every ounce of Bedelia's quiet panic.

She exhales, body tensing once again. However, when Will looks into her eyes, he sees something else in addition to the fear. *Determination*.

Will frowns, confused at this newfound change in her emotions. Is this her finally mustering up the courage to attempt to escape? To try her luck at attacking them? Will is about 90 percent sure she doesn't have a weapon. Unless...

At the beginning, there were three sets of cutlery per person, so a total of nine forks on the table. The first three forks were taken away when Hannibal cleaned up after the entrée. The second set of three was collected just now after the main course, leaving the last three on the table to eat the cake with. However, when Hannibal passed by, carrying the pile of dirty dishes away, Will remembered only seeing two forks in it.

He narrows his eyes, immediately looking at Bedelia. Immediately knowing where the missing utensil is. In the meantime, Hannibal approaches her in his unhurried but chill-inducing fashion. There is a neutral and unsuspecting smile on his face, revealing nothing. Will tells himself that Hannibal has to have been counting the forks too, keeping an eye on every single one of them. He *must've*. Or maybe he was like Will and only paid attention to the location of the knives, as they are a more obvious choice of weapon.

Hannibal stops by Bedelia's chair, at an arm's reach. At a stabbing reach. When Will glances at Bedelia's hands, he is not surprised to find one of them hiding out of view, on her lap under the table.

Like in a slowed-down scene of an action movie, Hannibal leans forward to place the dessert on the table. Bedelia's eyes immediately zero in on his chest that's angled towards her, exposed. A perfect opportunity.

Will's heart rate accelerates to an interstellar speed, and by the time he realises, his hands have already started moving.

Chapter End Notes

Don't we all just loooooove cliffhangers? What do you think will happen next? Let me know in the comments!

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

“I’d better call the taxi now. Driving would be irresponsible after all the gorgeous cocktails you’ve served us, Hannibal,” Bedelia explains with a faint and fake smile.

Of course she didn’t drive here in the first place. Not because of the alcohol she was going to consume, but because she needed to leave a paper trail of her whereabouts. If she disappeared tonight, the investigation would lead straight to Hannibal’s residence.

Clever. Infuriatingly clever. Will glares at Bedelia, not bothering to hide his displeasure at her last party trick.

Chapter Notes

Things escalate. An emotional rollercoaster ensues. A new character is introduced.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

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Like in a slowed-down scene of an action movie, Hannibal leans forward to place the dessert on the table. Bedelia’s eyes immediately zero in on his chest that’s angled towards her, exposed. A perfect opportunity.

Will’s heart rate accelerates to an interstellar speed, and by the time he realises, his hands have already started moving. His elbow hits the big and elaborate centrepiece, a bone-white set of stag antlers, tipping it across the table towards Hannibal and Bedelia.

The distraction causes them both to move abruptly to avoid getting hurt by the sharp tips of the antlers. Being the one with faster reflexes, better judgement, and a penchant for embracing danger as opposed to running from it, Hannibal quickly catches the centrepiece to stop it from falling and making a mess on the table and the floor. As he does so, he inadvertently steps away from Bedelia’s reach.

Safe and sound.

Will lets out the breath he’s been holding.

“Oh, shit. Sorry...” he mumbles.

He feels his cheeks heat up and prays that it will be interpreted as light embarrassment rather than nervousness in lieu of an impending threat. Then again, all cards have been revealed now and no one's in the dark anymore about what is really going on here.

Hannibal regains his composure quickly and smoothly, as expected. “Don't apologise, darling. Nothing was damaged.”

Next to him, Bedelia sits still and takes deep breaths, much like Will. As soon as Hannibal momentarily turns his back to them to walk around the large table, she gives Will a venomous look. In response, Will flashes her a smug smirk.

“Sanguinaccio Dolce, an Italian pudding made with blood,” Hannibal announces, coming around to Will's side and placing his share of the dessert in front of him. “Sweetened with chocolate and raisins.”

Will lets his cheeky smile linger for a while, wondering if Bedelia knows that the blood is from a cow, only in a derogatory sense.

He digs into the dish as soon as Hannibal resumes his seat, now more eager than ever to bring this evening to a conclusion. Playing with Bedelia has been great fun, but Will can't help but feel a twinge of anxiety in his stomach at the fact that she came close to almost hurting Hannibal. And the fact that they are about to finish eating and Hannibal still hasn't struck is gnawing on Will's insides. The man is really drawing this out as much as possible, and without a doubt enjoying it tremendously, whereas Will is starting to feel like he just wants this over and done with.

His fast eating is a stark contrast to Bedelia's incredibly slow pace. She is doing everything in her power to buy more time. Hannibal's speed is slotted neatly into the middle of the two extremes; not rushed but not overly lengthy either. The whole scenario would be comical if Will weren't so tightly strung with nerves.

At this point, he wouldn't be surprised if Hannibal didn't kill Bedelia until they were in the foyer, where she can practically touch the front door separating her from freedom. The predator in Hannibal would enjoy giving her a false sense of security, making her feel like there is still a chance she might get out alive.

Will finishes the dessert and washes it down with the remainder of his punch romaine. Both taste divine, of course, but his thoughts are too preoccupied with the upcoming bloodbath to fully appreciate Hannibal's culinary creations. He seeks out the man with his eyes, hoping for a hint, a sign, anything to give him a clue about what to expect.

But all Hannibal gives him is a slightly puzzled look. It's as if he's asking Will something, or expecting something specific. There is absolutely no chance he hasn't noticed Bedelia pinching a fork and being ready to attack him, for what it's worth. And there is also absolutely no chance he mistook Will's trick with the centrepiece for him just being generally clumsy. *So, what the hell is Hannibal waiting for?*

Poor Bedelia can't put off her fate forever, so eventually, when all of her Sanguinaccio Dolce is gone and their conversation has come to a natural end, they slowly start making their way back to the foyer. Too slowly for Will's liking.

"It was rather lovely to have your company for dinner, Bedelia," Hannibal says in a low purr. "I will remember this evening forever."

Bedelia's eyes jump between Will and Hannibal, unsure which one of them to expect the blow from. Because it's about to happen any minute now.

"The pleasure was all mine."

"A memorable night indeed," Will adds.

He takes a step towards the woman, just to force her to hurriedly take a step back. Although Hannibal doesn't show it, he must be enjoying the performance Will is putting on, too. Bedelia takes her phone out of her handbag, clutching onto it like a lifeline.

"I'd better call the taxi now. Driving would be irresponsible after all the gorgeous cocktails you've served us, Hannibal," she explains with a faint and fake smile.

Of course she didn't drive here in the first place. Not because of the alcohol she was going to consume, but because she needed to leave a paper trail of her whereabouts. If she disappeared tonight, the investigation would lead straight to Hannibal's residence.

Clever. *Infuriatingly clever*. Will glares at Bedelia, not bothering to hide his displeasure at her last party trick.

They could still get away with it, he supposes. Let her go now and intercept her later, before she gets to speak to the police. It would be risky, but better than not trying anything at all and having the cops knock on their door the next morning. He and Hannibal are going to need to discuss this, devise a plan of attack. But for now, Will decides to follow Hannibal's lead.

This is Hannibal's kill, after all.

The older man's calm composure stays intact as Bedelia dials the number and orders a taxi to his house. They chat some more until the bright gleam of headlights can be seen in the driveway. Hannibal, always a gentleman, offers to walk Bedelia to the car to make sure "she gets home safely". Behind his back, Will rolls his eyes.

He follows the other two outside regardless. The cold night air immediately seeps through the thin layer of his button-up shirt, making him shiver and his skin turn into goosebumps.

Though, on second thought, Will isn't entirely sure that it's due to the temperature anymore. It feels like he's been on edge all night, the anticipation growing stronger the longer Bedelia remains alive.

Will bids his goodbyes and reminds her that "they will see her again very soon," accompanied by a dark smile. Bedelia shivers too, visibly eager to get inside the taxi that would transport her to safety.

Only that safety is temporary.

Hannibal opens the door for her, murmuring his goodbyes too. Will watches as he and Bedelia exchange one last glance. Their eyes linger on each other a millisecond too long, as if the moment is significant somehow. Significant beyond what Bedelia already knows about Hannibal and his well-tailored person suit.

Will watches her, curious, because apart from fear and a small sliver of hope that she could persuade him not to harm her, he hasn't been able to get a grasp on any of Bedelia's emotions.

Until now.

Something about the way she looks at Hannibal feels off. Unusual and odd, sticking out like an incorrectly placed puzzle piece. Will strains his senses, trying to puncture through her carefully-constructed mask to get to see the real her. And the first thing that stands out to him is that when Bedelia gives Hannibal that final glance, she regards Hannibal as an *equal*. There is a sense of closure, not related to accepting her fate but something more akin to a deal being completed. A promise fulfilled. A debt forgiven.

Will blinks, confused. What is all of this about, and why is it so important *right now*?

He blinks again, and the moment is gone. Hannibal closes the door and the car takes off. He turns back to Will, his expression that of purposeful neutrality.

"What the hell was that?" Will questions. Something tells him that he won't like the answer.

"I had anticipated the possibility that she'd use a taxi," Hannibal replies nonchalantly, making his way back inside, Will in his wake. "And I'd taken the necessary precautions to prevent it from leading back to us."

"No, I mean. The look she gave you before she left."

"What look, Will?"

Fire ignites in Will's eyes at that. A warning; *stop trying to act clueless*.

"You know exactly what I mean," he says sternly.

The feeling that things are not the way they seem intensifies inside him, twisting his stomach into a knot. They make it all the way back to the dining room before Will stops abruptly, needing to think. Loose pieces of information are floating in his mind like Scrabble letters, and he just needs to rearrange them to form the right word.

"You were always going to let her go," he concludes then, eyes boring into Hannibal's in an accusing fashion.

"That isn't entirely true." There is no doubt Hannibal can see Will's rising irritation, however, he is choosing to stay calm and collected. Will doesn't know if that's better or worse. "What I

wanted was to act in the moment, without a predetermined plan. To see how fate and circumstance would come together to lead us to the right outcome.”

Will groans in frustration, feeling exhausted from the mental effort of trying to decode Hannibal and Bedelia’s motivations, especially when both of them seem to be suspiciously unwilling to share them with him. Will slumps onto one of the chairs and buries his face in his hands, mainly so that he doesn’t have to look at Hannibal. The man’s influence is highly distracting, clouding his head and interfering with his rational thinking. Causing the worst kind of cognitive dissonance. It’s because Will wants to believe him — Hannibal would have no reason to lie to him, right? — but at the same time, his intuition is telling him he shouldn’t be so naive.

Even though Bedelia is gone, Will is still seeing her in his mind’s eye, trying to peek behind her veil. She is hiding something, and now that Will has caught on, he isn’t going to stop until he gets to the truth. He just needs to get past all the fear she was saturated with all night. So much fear. Layers and layers of it, almost a ridiculous amount.

As if it was piled on deliberately.

Will’s head snaps up, immediately seeking out Hannibal and looking him right in the eye.

“Hannibal. I want you to answer something honestly,” he demands.

That fire in his eyes burns brighter now, shooting out angry little sparks. *If you lie to me, I will know.*

“Yes?”

“Did Bedelia know about you and me before she got here?”

Will doesn’t know what kind of answer he’s expecting, honestly. Some more bullshit about fate and circumstance? A little white lie to placate him? Or a shameless outright lie? Because he wouldn’t put it past Hannibal, at this point.

Still, Hannibal’s reply manages to astound him.

“Yes, Will,” he says, voice awfully even, “she’s known all along.”

“*What?* ”

Will simply stares, paralysed by disbelief and sheer ire, while his mind gears into overdrive. Suddenly, he knows exactly who referred Bedelia to his hitman services in the first place.

“You... You arranged this,” Will seethes, practically spitting at the other man. “Hannibal, what the *fuck?*”

From the way Hannibal purses his lips, Will can tell that the man’s answer isn’t going to please him, not one bit.

“I was curious to see what you would do.”

Will shakes his head and throws up his hands; this is supposed to be common-fucking-sense. “I did exactly what anyone else in my position would’ve done! I came straight to you, to tell you you’re in danger.”

Will’s head starts hurting from pure frustration.

“You are not like anyone else,” Hannibal points out.

“Don’t change the subject,” Will quips back at him.

He silences Hannibal’s next attempt to speak with a murderous look. For a minute, they’re both quiet, simply eyeing each other like two wrestlers before the round starts.

“You set this all up,” Will starts again, feeling so incredulous and outright betrayed that his voice shakes. “You made her hire me to kill you.”

“She owed me a favour, and this was the perfect opportunity to settle the debt.”

Will couldn’t possibly care less about any favours or debts. “What did you think I was going to do? Kill you for the money?”

Even saying it out loud sounds ridiculous. The sum Bedelia offered was sizable, but Will never once considered taking it. No amount of money could make up for a world without Hannibal, the only man who understands Will.

But now, it’s starting to become abundantly, *painfully* clear to Will that Hannibal doesn’t in fact understand him at all. Will thought they had agreed on no more manipulation when they had that heart-to-heart talk in Hannibal’s bedroom a few days ago. No more mind games, no more Hannibal deliberately provoking him. They specifically discussed this, and they both agreed that it was toxic and destructive. And yet, not a week later, Hannibal does it again.

“Do you not trust me, Hannibal?” Will asks, betrayal and hurt nearly making him choke up. “What have I done to make you doubt me like this? Doubt my loyalty to you?”

Hannibal’s face is emotionless, and his body tense and still. Still, Will can tell that behind all that incredible self-control, there is a storm of emotions; anger rumbling like thunder and hurt flashing like lightning.

“You made no attempt on Bedelia’s life, even though tonight provided plenty of opportunity,” Hannibal explains coldly.

Will can only stare back, stunned. He didn’t try to kill Bedelia because he thought it was Hannibal’s kill. Not because he isn’t loyal.

“You said my life is more valuable than the money,” Hannibal tells him, accusatory and imposing. “But evidently, not valuable enough to punish the person who has threatened me.”

Will wants to scream. He wants to growl like an animal, laugh like a maniac, and tear his hair out. Once again, Hannibal is trying to emotionally manipulate him. Trying to make Will feel like Hannibal is the victim here, even though he was the one who *staged* it all.

“You know what?” Will speaks, his words slow, heavy and dripping with venom. “Fuck you, Hannibal.”

He grabs the first knife he can find and drives it into the table with enough force to decapitate a man, just to piss Hannibal off and add more sting to his insult. It’s a dessert knife so it’s not very sharp, but it sinks into the pristine tabletop, causing the wood to split and form a massive crack across the surface.

It works like a charm to get a visible rise out of Hannibal, making him snarl. Will can see his fingers flex, fighting the impulse to lunge at him.

“I’m sick of your shit. We’re done,” Will hisses defiantly.

If Hannibal wants to fight him because of this, he can bring it on. Will feels played, deceived, and so fucking tired of being treated like a goddamn toy for Hannibal to wind up and watch him go.

Instead of attacking him, however, Hannibal assumes a low and measured voice.

“Will, there is no need for —”

Will immediately cuts him off. “I said I’m *done*!”

Hannibal’s attempts to pacify him won’t work this time. If anything, the placating tone makes Will feel like he’s being scolded by his dad or a school teacher.

“Will...” Hannibal tries again. The stupid, stubborn asshole.

In a burst of rage, Will grabs the knife that’s still stuck in the table and hurls it towards Hannibal. He doesn’t bother aiming it, knowing Hannibal will easily dodge, but he puts enough force behind it to make it crystal-clear that he is serious.

“If I see your face again, I swear I will fucking maim you,” Will growls.

He storms out of the house without looking back.

After getting back to his place and kicking the front door open in frustration, Will blocks Hannibal’s number. He knows it’s petty but he doesn’t care. He can’t sleep, too strung out by the long and tense night that ended in total disaster. When the clock strikes 4 am, Will decides to drink himself into an oblivion just so he doesn’t have to witness the sunrise and feel miserable about his now-ruined relationship.

So if — no, when — Hannibal inevitably calls him from another, unblocked number, it’ll be best that Will is as inebriated as humanly possible, without any chance of engaging in or

remembering the conversation. Because knowing Hannibal's unrelenting nature, Will fully expects the man to approach him again at some point. The fucker is persistent and not scared of Will's threats.

It will either be more roses or other creepy gifts, or Hannibal personally showing up at Will's door to talk. In which case Will is going to throw another knife at him, actually aiming and making sure it hits the intended target.

He's done with Hannibal, for real this time.

He's done with being lied to and manipulated, done with being made to feel like the bad guy when he really isn't. Will had really tried to make things work with Hannibal, had truly believed he'd met the right person to share his life with. But of course, it was too good to be true. It hurts to walk away but right now, Will feels like he doesn't have another choice. What they had wasn't a healthy relationship, but an illusion built upon a fast-rotting foundation.

Hannibal's betrayal feels like a thorn in his heart, like poison in his veins. Killing him slowly. Making him rot from the inside. So, Will buries himself in a bottle of gin and tries to forget.

He doesn't really know if it's good or bad that he doesn't hear from Hannibal at all in the next few days. It could mean the man actually decided to respect Will's wishes to be left alone this time, in hopes that Will is going to change his mind and come back. Or, Hannibal is simply not interested in pursuing him anymore and has moved on. As much as Will keeps acting like the latter option is best for him, deep inside he hopes that Hannibal still cares.

Every day, Will expects visitors to his property, Hannibal or not. Surely the cops are due to show up at his front porch with a search warrant, any time now. Hopefully, Will is going to be too hammered to be interrogated about allegedly being a contract killer, but they would find the rifle eventually. Thanks Hannibal, for fucking up not only his heart but his job and whole life, too.

However, when Will doesn't see a police car pull into his driveway the day after the altercation with Hannibal, or several more days after that, he deduces that Bedelia mustn't have told them anything. Considering that she had an arrangement with Hannibal all this time, she probably knew better than getting the police involved. All the better for Will.

He doesn't think he can tolerate seeing or talking to another human right now. He's been holed up in his house for almost a week, nourishing his body with booze instead of food. When his dogs start to avoid him, confronted by the smell, Will figures it may be time for a shower. Is there any point, though?

He takes care of the dogs, as always, but he doesn't see any reasons for taking care of himself. He has nowhere to go, no one to impress. So why not waste away in his house until he completely runs out of money, with nothing but the stinging heartbreak and awful-tasting liquor to keep him company?

When Will finally gets a call, it's not from Hannibal or the police. It's Z, informing Will that there is another job for him. So much for wasting away until he doesn't have a penny left. Will accepts the assignment, agreeing to meet with Z for details the next day. Doing nothing

every day is starting to get boring, and this distraction will take his mind off Hannibal and stop him from wallowing in self-pity. Hell, he doesn't even care if he gets caught this time.

He's got nothing to lose at this point.

The next morning, Will reluctantly drags himself to the shower and then to the grocery store to get something substantial to eat, before heading out to meet Z. This time, the meeting place is a deserted multilevel parking lot on the outskirts of town. When Will approaches on foot, having parked further away just in case, Z is waiting for him on the first floor.

"There's someone for you to meet," the man informs him instead of a greeting.

Will gives him a curt, disinterested nod. It's been difficult to care about anything lately due to his deeply apathetic and borderline depressed state. However, now, Will's curiosity is slowly starting to rise.

He's never met anyone else relating to this particular employer, apart from Z. This is how most of Will's clients operate. It's safer for them to stay anonymous and never meet Will in person, instead sending one of their goons to handle all direct contact.

Still, Will can't help but think, what if it is the employer himself? Maybe he's so impressed by Will's continuous and faultless service that he wants to recruit Will to formally be part of whatever criminal gang he's part of. In which case Will would have to refuse, because there is absolutely no way he's getting involved with a mob and their stupid but nonetheless deadly drama.

It's like high school, except with way higher stakes. There are cliques, unspoken rules, and initiation rituals complete with blood pacts to secure one's lifelong loyalty. It's all about getting in fights with rival gangs, taking an eye for an eye, risking your own life to defend the honour of some idiot that happens to be part of the same gang as you. *Unnecessary drama* that Will has zero interest getting entangled in.

He prefers to work as an independent party and be his own boss, and if it means walking away from whatever Z and his employer are proposing today, then so be it. The only problem with this course of action is that men like Will's employer don't usually take 'no' for an answer.

The thought causes a chill to run down Will's spine. He brought a handgun — he always brings one to his "work meetings", just in case — but he hopes to god he won't have to use it. Z keeps a poker face and continues walking up the curved ramp leading to the upper floors of the parking lot, Will in his wake. Neither of them speaks the entire way up to the fifth, penultimate floor.

As they ascend and the entire floor comes into view, darkened by the narrow ceiling and the lack of artificial lighting, Will can see a single man standing in the middle of the large space.

He is tall and bulky, wearing a mustard-coloured long coat and a brown felt fedora hat. His broad stature speaks of strength, resilience, and a complete absence of fear.

“Will Graham,” the man greets.

Those two words are enough to make Will’s heart rate skyrocket and another, stronger shiver run through him. *They know his real name.* He’s been using an alias from the beginning to maintain his privacy and safety, and so far, Z has only ever referred to him using that alias. With a bitter taste on his tongue, Will realises that he should’ve known this would happen. His employer is wealthy and careful enough to have done a thorough background check on him, most likely knowing everything about him by now, down to his full name, birth date, social security number, and address.

Still, being referred to by his real name makes Will feel like something is wrong. Unwilling to let Z or the other man catch even a glimpse of his uneasiness, he holds his head high and his voice steady:

“Afternoon.”

The man takes a step towards Will, his body language not straight up threatening, but not entirely friendly either.

“My name is Jack Crawford, and I work for the FBI.”

Chapter End Notes

Here i am, back with another cliffhanger!! 🐱

What does Jack want, any theories? Tell me in the comments!

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

“We have enough evidence to convict you of six counts of murder,” Crawford announces. His loud voice booms and echoes in the large space. “That’s more than enough to put you in a cell forever.”

Will bites the inside of his cheek.

Well, *fuck*.

Chapter Notes

I'm back with another chapter, sorry for the delay!

When I posted the first chapter of this fic, I got a comment from Hekime, who theorized that Z could be an undercover FBI agent. I hadn't been able to get that brilliant idea out of my head since, and now it's come into fruition! So Hekime, if you're still reading this fic, this chapter goes out to you ♥

“My name is Jack Crawford, and I work for the FBI,” the tall and broad man informs him.

Will’s heart misses a beat. Then another.

He freezes, drenched in cold sweat, and lets his eyes slowly scan the empty parking lot. There is a smug smirk on Z’s face, and he doesn’t look bothered in the slightest by the fact that the *fucking FBI* is involved. Of course. It all makes sense now. The infuriatingly cocky face Z always wears, as if he’s smarter and better than the rest of the criminal underworld, can only belong to someone who isn’t actually part of said underworld. This leads Will to the only possible conclusion: Z is an undercover FBI agent and he’s led Will here on purpose.

God fucking damn it.

Will braces himself for the ambush; for men in tactical gear jumping out of the shadows with their guns pointed at him. Tackling him, incapacitating him, and sending him straight to jail.

However, when several minutes pass without anyone attacking Will, he begins to realize this must be something else. There has to be a reason Crawford is here. Being the head of the BAU, he’d have better things to do than personally coming to arrest people like Will. It’s not

like Will is a notorious serial killer whose capture would be a big deal. Nobody even knew of his existence.

Well, until now.

Crawford continues to stare at Will expectantly, so Will raises his chin defiantly and grits out:

“What do you want?”

“If you run, you’ll be dead before you reach the ground floor. I’ve got men inside and outside this building,” Crawford tells him bluntly.

Will rolls his eyes at that, giving the man a ‘no shit Sherlock’ look. Being an ex-cop, he doesn’t need things spelled out for him. Will is acutely aware of Z watching him, hand lingering close to the gun holstered at his hip, ready to shoot if Will tries anything. Crawford is more than likely armed too underneath the long camel-brown coat he’s wearing. Will stays still, keeping his hands visible and resting at his sides.

If Crawford isn’t here to immediately arrest him, it means he must want to talk. However, Will is in no rush to urge him on. The most important thing he’s learned during his years of both serving in and evading law enforcement is that the more you talk, the more information you’re giving the cops to hold against you. So, instead of trying to talk his way out of this mess, Will stays silent and simply gives the other man a wary look.

“Listen carefully, Graham, ‘cause this is a one-time offer.”

Will doesn’t need to be told twice. Despite knowing that running is futile, his eyes scan the spacious parking lot, looking for escape routes. They’re on the fifth floor, so there’s no jumping off the building and landing on the ground with all of his bones intact. The only viable exits, the car ramp and the staircase, are most likely occupied by Crawford’s goons. Will is trapped, with no other choice than to hope that whatever Crawford has planned for him will let him leave this place alive and in one piece.

Which, considering that this is the fucking FBI and he’s a contract killer, isn’t looking very likely.

“We have enough evidence to convict you of six counts of murder,” Crawford announces. His loud voice booms and echoes in the large space. “That’s more than enough to put you in a cell forever.”

Will bites the inside of his cheek.

Well, *fuck*.

Six. That’s all of the hits he’s made for the employer he and Z are involved with. And Will knows for certain that Crawford isn’t bluffing about having the evidence. All of Will’s communications with his employer were done through Z, who’s no doubt been feeding this

information to the feds on the down low. The evidence against Will is bulletproof; Z had access to the body parts Will sent as keepsakes to the boss as proof of his kills.

Hell, now that Will thinks about it, maybe collecting body parts wasn't a weird whim of their employer after all, but Z's scheme to trick Will into handing over incriminating DNA evidence.

Either way, Will is royally and irrevocably fucked.

All thanks to Z, the slick, backstabbing son of a bitch. Will shoots the man a venomous glance, to which Z responds with another condescending smirk. Like the nerdy kid who's successfully snitched to the teacher about his classmates eating candy in class.

"Sounds like a pretty grim future, doesn't it, Graham?" Z taunts. He can rot in hell, the pathetic asshole.

Reluctantly, Will presses 'pause' on his cathartic fantasy of decapitating Z right here on the spot. He's got practically nothing to lose at this point, so he sneers at the men in front of him, purely out of spite:

"I don't know what you're talking about, agent Crawfish."

The large vein in Crawford's forehead looks like it's about to burst. "Crawford," he corrects, unimpressed.

Will stares back with his best unapologetic expression.

"Cut the crap, Graham. You'll either do a life sentence, or you'll do as I say."

"I'm assuming those two are different?"

Crawford nods curtly, and a little sliver of hope ignites in Will's chest.

Any option that isn't a lifetime behind bars sounds like an option worth consideration. Will understands how incredibly fortunate he is to even be offered an alternative option, whatever it may be. Whatever Crawford has in store for him can't be good, but at least, there is a certain comfort in the notion that he's to get a choice.

"Today's the luckiest day of your life," Crawford tells him. And in that moment, Will is inclined to believe him. "Immunity for your crimes is on the cards. That is, if you cooperate with the FBI."

Ah, of course. Will isn't surprised in the slightest.

The classic spiel of '*Work with the feds, snitch on your crime buddies. We'll make sure they won't come after you.*' Only a fool would accept this kind of deal. Will knows that being who he is, the law will *never* be on his side. If he gives up information about his criminal associates in the hopes of protection from the FBI, those same associates will make sure he's dead before sunrise. The FBI won't give a damn about him. Crawford would only be glad that they got rid of Will, so that he doesn't have to.

No, Will isn't a fool. Who do they want him to snitch on, anyway? His employer? Surely they've got that base covered with Z. Unless...

"Oh, is *agent Zeller* so bad at his snitching job that you have to rope in someone else?" Will drawls.

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Z glaring murderously at him. Despite clearly not being the one with the upper hand here, a deep sense of satisfaction settles into Will's chest. He sincerely hopes their employer busts Z for being an undercover fed and makes him pay for it. In the ideal world, he'd hire Will to get rid of the man. The perfect revenge.

"Not about that," Crawford says gruffly, getting increasingly tired of Will's jeering attitude. "It's about the Chesapeake Ripper."

"Huh?"

Will's curiosity is now piqued, but so is his puzzlement. The Chesapeake Ripper is one of the most notorious killers in the country. His name dominates the press for weeks every time he drops a body. The guy is not only a serial murderer but a cannibal, and he turns the bodies of his victims into grotesque creations. Will has never taken a particular interest in the Ripper or crossed paths with him - and thankfully so - which is why he struggles to see how this is all connected.

"And this is relevant to me, how?" Will enquires, genuinely clueless.

"We know who he is."

"Uh... congrats?"

Crawford rubs his temples with his hand, his tolerance of Will's sarcastic remarks wearing dangerously thin.

"We know that you know who he is, too," he informs Will, and his tone conveys absolute certainty.

The words "You're mistaken" form on Will's tongue, but remain unsaid as the realisation hits him like a bolt of lightning. It couldn't be any more obvious.

Of-fucking-course the Chesapeake Ripper is Hannibal. The cannibalism part should've been a dead giveaway. The only reason Will didn't draw the connection before was because it never occurred to him that Hannibal might have a murder alias. So, it turns out Will has been dating and sleeping with one of the most sadistic, deadly and sought-after killers in the country. Just as he thought his life couldn't get any more bizarre.

Will knew Hannibal was dangerous from the moment he first saw him. He knew Hannibal murdered and ate people as a hobby. And it didn't faze him. So in a way, learning that Hannibal has his very own serial killer nickname and is famous for his murders doesn't change anything that Will already knows about him. The only thing that's different is that Will had assumed Hannibal was killing quietly and away from the public eye. Like any

sensible killer that wants to avoid capture would do. But no, Hannibal Lecter, with his inflated sense of grandiosity and invincibility, can't resist turning the bodies of his victims into fucking art installations and parading them right under the FBI's nose.

In addition to feeling angry at Hannibal, Will now feels annoyed too. What was Hannibal thinking, taunting the FBI like that? You play with fire, you get burned. Hannibal had it coming, whether Will is involved or not.

"Here's the deal, Graham, and I'm only going to lay it out once," Crawford says. "You have 3 days to bring me something that will convict Lecter. Tangible evidence. Do it and you'll have your ticket to freedom."

The words play in an endless loop in Will's head. The FBI are clearly onto Hannibal, but it seems like Crawford doesn't have enough evidence to prove he's the Ripper. That would explain why the man is here to strike a deal with Will. Help the feds catch Hannibal in exchange for a literal 'get out of jail free' card.

"Can't help you. I don't know the guy," Will says with a shrug.

Crawford has proof of him being a killer, but they can't necessarily prove that he knows Hannibal. Will bets on that fact as his last attempt to stop himself from getting entangled further in the FBI's web. However, the look on Crawford's face makes it clear that he isn't buying a single word Will is saying.

"We have a witness who confirms your close affiliation with Hannibal Lecter," he points out.

It takes Will no more than a second to figure out who he means. *Bedelia*. She's the only person who has seen Will and Hannibal together and is able to identify them. And she has a very good reason to have informed the cops about this too, seeing that Will and Hannibal have made explicit threats to her safety. All thanks to Hannibal's stupid plan of 'testing Will's loyalty'.

Will grits his teeth, damning Hannibal to the seventh circle of hell. If Hannibal hadn't brought Bedelia into this, it's very likely Crawford wouldn't have learned that he and Will know each other. And as such, Crawford wouldn't have started pressing Will for evidence on Hannibal.

Due to Z's double identity, the FBI must've known of Will's contract killing endeavours for a while. Will suspects the only reason the feds had left him alone up until this point was because they were more interested in catching bigger fish, the big bosses in charge of the major criminal networks. Will is just a pawn, the least important figure in the grand game of chess between good and evil. No one cares about the pawn. Not until now.

Not until an opportunity presented to blackmail Will into helping the FBI take down another high-profile killer.

So, not only did Hannibal shoot himself in the leg there, but he took Will down with him too. Just as Will thought his life couldn't get any worse, the ground has opened up underneath his feet and plunged him into his own personal inferno.

Crawford seems certain Will is going to throw Hannibal under the bus to save himself. Will, however, isn't so sure about that. Between everything that's happened today, he feels he can't think clearly.

"If my *close affiliation* with him is really as close as you claim it is, what makes you think I'd sell him out?" Will asks, the question directed as much at himself as it is at Crawford.

Whatever relationship he and Hannibal may have had is over now. Since the day they broke up, Will has been filled with so much hurt and rage that he's despised the mere thought of seeing Hannibal again. For now, Hannibal has left him alone, but Will is more than certain this will change soon. Considering the man's track record of invading Will's privacy and relentlessly harassing him to accept gifts or dinner invitations, Will knows he will be seeing or hearing from Hannibal in no time.

This time, he doesn't know if it's for better or for worse.

"Because bastards like you don't have a conscience," Z chimes in to answer the question, his tone poisoned with contempt for everything that Will stands for.

Normally, Will would pay Z's comment no mind. Conscience is a concept invented by people who wanted to feel good about themselves but had no other redeeming qualities to base it on. If Will was ever a "good person", then the last shreds of that goodness dissipated when he pulled the trigger on his first kill. It's always been him against the world. Trusting no one but himself, and saving his own skin before anyone else's. So, why should this time be different?

He's already fed up with Hannibal's manipulative behaviour as it was, but what he's learned today about the FBI's plans has added fuel to the fire. Hannibal has fucked them both over, to put mildly. And Will be damned if he lets his *conscience* stop him from making Hannibal pay for all the shit he's put Will through.

Will looks Crawford in the eye. "What guarantee do I have that you'll drop the charges against me if I help you catch the Ripper?"

Crawford slides a hand into the inside pocket of his long brown coat and produces a white blank envelope.

"I have the agreement detailing your immunity right here. Effective as soon as Lecter is locked up."

Will eyes the envelope warily. There it is, a literal ticket to freedom, within his grasp. Freedom from not only persecution, but from having to deal with Hannibal's bullshit again, too. The deal is too tempting to refuse. At the same time, it's also too good to be true. Will decides to save himself from having to make a choice by reminding himself that the only way Crawford will let him walk away unharmed is if he plays along and takes the deal.

And once he's safely out of this parking lot and Crawford's claws, Will can truly think about what he's going to do. Will ruining Hannibal's life the same way he ruined Will's bring him the feeling of justice and satisfaction that he craves?

“Let me see.” Will extends his hand for the envelope.

He’s not dumb enough to agree to anything without reading every line of fine print on the agreement. Will is no lawyer, but he knows enough about witness immunity to be able to spot the most obvious catches. Crawford hands him the envelope, maintaining the distance between them where possible. Distrustful of Will just as much as Will is distrustful of him.

Will’s eyes study all the clauses and subclauses on the document. Upon successful arrest and conviction of Hannibal, he will be granted immunity from prosecution for the six hired kills he completed for his employer. It looks as legitimate as it can get, so Will straightens and sets his eyes back on Crawford.

“Alright, deal.”

A satisfied expression spreads onto Crawford’s face. “Monday morning. Back here.” He points at the floor of the parking lot with his index finger. “You come to me with evidence, or we will come for you.”

Will gives him a cold nod in acknowledgement, stuffs the envelope into his pocket and takes his leave. He descends all the way to the ground floor using the winding car ramp, staring strictly ahead of him the entire time. He can’t shake the feeling that if he dares to glance behind him, the temporary safety he’s been granted will be broken and gunshots will poison the air.

Will exits the parking lot with heavy steps and an even heavier heart.

Despite being used to working with deadlines, Will has never been as painfully aware of the passage of time as he is now. 72 hours feels a lot longer in theory than in real life, especially when every minute that he spends doing nothing about the predicament he’s in brings him closer to being jailed for life. Indecision weighs Will down like a ton of rocks. He’s being pulled in two opposing directions: the need to see Hannibal, and the need to get as far away from Hannibal as possible.

More than once he finds himself with his phone in hand, thumb hovering over the dial button next to Hannibal’s name. What would he even say? Would he sacrifice himself and tell Hannibal to run, or would he sweet-talk himself back into Hannibal’s life and snoop around his house for evidence?

Will is still angry, and that anger is pushing him towards the second option. But at the same time, Hannibal still has a hold on his heart, and peeling that grip off will leave Will with a bleeding wound.

In the end, Will shoves the phone into the farthest corner of the kitchen cupboard, next to his bad day stash of cigarettes. He can't risk leaving it on his nightstand where it's easily accessible in the middle of the night, when his wrath towards Hannibal gives way to nightmare-ridden vulnerability.

The next morning, after the coffee has been brewed and the stash is one – or several – cigarettes lighter, Will deems it safe to pull the phone out. To his great surprise, the screen shows a missed call. Will blinks at it, convinced he must be still dreaming.

10:26 am - 1 missed call from Hannibal.

That was about an hour ago. As Will continues staring at the screen, he starts to feel like he's drowning. Alone in the middle of an endless ocean, hanging onto a piece of a wooden board for his life. And the one in a million chance of a cruise ship passing by and rescuing him happened an hour ago, while he was dozing off. Will draws in a ragged breath, but instead of air it feels like he's inhaling a lungful of ice-cold water.

He coughs instinctively and forces himself to blink until the images of the unforgiving ocean fade away. Will isn't abandoned in the middle of the Atlantic, and just because he missed one call doesn't mean Hannibal is forever out of reach. With clammy fingers, Will dials the man's number.

Hannibal answers almost immediately. He must've been desperately waiting for his own rescue ship.

"Hello, Will."

The melodic hum of his voice is like sustenance to Will's starved soul. There is a raw note to it, a longing that's just the right shape to fill the emptiness in Will's chest.

"Hi..." Will mumbles in response. His mouth is numb and his tongue heavy, weighed down by all the conflicting emotions. He wants to tell Hannibal everything, and at the same time he wants to tell him nothing. So, to avoid both outcomes, Will says the first neutral thing that comes to his mind: "I was asleep, sorry."

"My apologies, I shouldn't have called so early."

For something so considerate and well-meaning, the words hurt Will like a hidden thorn in the stem of a rose. It's almost noon, Hannibal has nothing to apologize for. Because of the emotional distance between them, Hannibal is now defaulting to his usual polite and detached demeanour. And it makes Will feel like he's talking to a *stranger*.

Is this who they are to each other now? Will can practically feel himself bleeding; the heart wound has started to form, caused by Hannibal fading out of his life.

Will rushes to say something. *Anything*. Anything to keep the conversation going. Anything to keep holding onto the rapidly thinning thread that's still connecting them.

"No, it's fine. I sleep too much these days."

The barely audible sigh on the other end tells Will that Hannibal can't say the same about himself.

"Our last dinner did not go the way I intended it to," Hannibal continues after a loaded pause. "And I realize that it was a miscalculation on my part that sent it off-course. I would like to dine with you again and talk about things, if you are amenable. My place, an evening of your choosing."

A lump rises in Will's throat, which he struggles to swallow back down. Crawford's voice echoes in his head. *Bring me something that will convict Lecter and you'll have your ticket to freedom.*

Perhaps Z was right in saying that men like Will don't have a conscience. If Will were a good man, he would hang up right now without responding to Hannibal's invitation. Hell, he wouldn't have called Hannibal back at all. He would've stayed away and done everything he could to keep Hannibal out of Crawford's deadly grasp.

But Will is not a good man.

He's not good, not morally upright, and not even half-decent at best. He's no Jesus who chose to sacrifice himself for the sins of others. Will is bitter, vindictive and selfish. He is retribution. He is karma.

And everybody knows that karma is a *bitch*. Hannibal was so eager to test Will's loyalty. Looks like he's getting more than he bargained for.

"Sure, okay," Will agrees. "Tomorrow night?"

Isn't it ironic that his mouth no longer feels heavy and immovable? With vengefulness slicking the way, the sweet conniving words spill out of his mouth with impeccable ease. Blinding. Deceiving. Betraying.

"Wonderful. I shall prepare Lomo Saltado," Hannibal replies, blissfully unaware. "Thank you, Will."

Will looks away.

"I'll see you tomorrow."

"You will."

No, he's definitely not Jesus. Right now, Will feels more like Judas, set on betraying Hannibal with a traitorous kiss. Burning bridges always feels easier than building them, anyway.

"Will? One more thing."

"Yeah?"

“There is a delivery with your name on it at your local post office. A humble act of making amends. A compensatory gift for wronging you. An offering of a do-over. Whatever you want it to be.” Hannibal trails off, taking a deep breath before continuing: “If you don’t wish to collect it, it will be automatically donated to charity after this week.”

In all his hatefulness, Will completely forgot to expect this, despite knowing Hannibal’s penchant for gift-giving. He feels like the breath has been knocked out of him, spilling out some of that vengefulness in the process.

“Oh... thanks,” he mumbles softly.

“You are welcome, Will. Until tomorrow.”

“Bye, Hannibal.”

The delivery that’s waiting for Will at the post office is not a single package but two large items that take up the whole front counter when the attendant brings them out. The first item is a gigantic bouquet of flowers. Will doesn’t know much about floral symbolism, but his first guess would be that the purple hyacinths spell out “I’m sorry”, and the white tulips stand for “Will you forgive me?”. Will’s favourite thing about this one-sided communicating through flowers is that he isn’t expected to produce a response.

The second item is a bouquet too, of sorts. In a big basket, arranged atop of green leaves is an assortment of various small gifts; handcrafted fishing lures, a bottle of Will’s favourite whiskey, a tin of gourmet coffee, an impossibly warm and soft woolen scarf, and an expensive-looking watch. All items have been specifically picked out with Will’s taste in mind. The gift basket is topped off with artisanal dog treats, because Hannibal knows that showing care for Will would be incomplete without also showing care for his dogs.

It’s a very thoughtfully chosen present, but what makes a bigger impression on Will is how Hannibal went about delivering it. Sending the items to a post office for collection instead of directly to Will’s door means he’s giving Will the option to decline the act of courtship if he so wishes. A huge contrast to his previous practices of violating Will’s privacy and leaving his gifts around Will’s house and car. It seems that Hannibal has learned from his mistakes and wants to do better.

Or maybe he’s simply trying to manipulate Will into feeling sympathetic and forgiving him. Sincere or not, Will wishes Hannibal stopped trying. Because Will’s forgiveness comes with a price.

Did Judas regret his decision to sell Jesus out in the end? Will doesn’t know, he never went to Sunday school. He only knows that his resentment towards Hannibal has mixed with his resentment towards himself for what he’s about to do, and he can no longer tell the two apart.

Will sighs and takes both packages home.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

“Thank you again for agreeing to join me tonight, Will. It means a lot to me,” he says, his voice but a soft murmur and yet infused with so much genuine gratitude.

So many words instead of simply saying *I miss you*.

“Thank you for dinner, it was lovely,” Will replies.

Even more words instead of simply saying *I miss you too*.

Chapter Notes

Hello and apologies for taking so long to write this chapter! My motivation has been at an all time low since October, but it seems that I've got it back now.

P.S. I've received a few comments lately appreciating & wishing for more bottom Will content. Well, you're welcome ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The whiskey is burning Will from the inside, the new watch on his wrist feels like a shackle, and the scarf around his neck feels like a noose. Wearing Hannibal's gifts should feel comforting, but instead it feels like he's dressed in fifty shades of self-imposed guilt.

Will swallows down his feelings and presses his mouth shut, caging them inside. He knocks on the door.

When Hannibal opens it not a minute later, it's in his usual gentlemanly manner, greeting Will warmly and taking his coat. The sense of familiarity is in the air, enveloping both of them in its soothing embrace, and Will could almost trick himself into thinking that their break-up never happened. That the deal with Jack Crawford never happened.

That what he's come here to do will not happen.

Only that it will.

Because there is no other way. Regardless of how things turn out, regardless of what *choice* Will makes, he's going to hate himself anyway. And he'd rather hate himself for being a traitor than for being a martyr.

“Would you like a glass of Bâtard-Montrachet while I finish up in the kitchen?” Hannibal asks, effortlessly breezy and casual like a bobber dancing on the surface of the lake.

Meanwhile, Will feels sunken to the bottom of that same lake, held down by a pile of rocks and unable to get back up.

“Maybe with dinner,” he answers, his smile tighter than he wants it to be.

Alcohol has an insidious way of clouding minds and loosening lips. Inviting honesty and cultivating confessions. Encouraging everything that Will desperately wants to be when he’s with Hannibal, but can’t. As much as Will’s insides beg at him for a soothing glass of something strong, he knows that sober vigilance is infinitely better than drunken sloppiness.

Hannibal nods, his mirthful demeanour unwavering, and offers Will a glass of water instead. Will takes it, drains it faster than a dying plant in the desert - when did his mouth get so dry anyway? - and follows Hannibal into the kitchen. There, Will immediately sees what looks like a roasted leg cooling on the counter. *Jackpot*.

Without really meaning to, Will’s eyes flit to Hannibal, who is now adding finishing touches to the appetizer course before transferring it to the dining area. The detailed explanation about the origin of the “sweet potato crostini with creme fraiche, dried cranberries, and almonds” is only half-registered by Will’s consciousness. Instead, his full attention is on trying to analyse or predict the other man’s intentions. Hannibal is visibly in a cheerful mood, without a doubt hopeful that he can convince Will to reconsider his choice of ending their relationship. It would be the most Hannibal-like thing to do. A man like him has unwavering confidence that he will get what he wants, be it a business venture or pursuit of a romantic interest.

But right now, Hannibal is making the mistake of focusing on the *best* in Will, when really, he should be watching out for the *worst*.

Will shivers, resolutely locking those thoughts away, and busies himself with helping Hannibal carry the plates of food to the dining room. He’s grateful for having something to occupy his mind and hands because it means small talk can be kept to the minimum. Will would rather save his words for the bigger, more serious talk that will inevitably follow.

And sure enough, it begins halfway through the main course.

“Thank you for joining me, Will,” Hannibal starts off, his tone markedly solemn. “Apologies are in order, and I wanted to deliver them in person.”

Will resorts to a simple nod, inviting Hannibal to continue.

“It was my mistake to plot behind your back. My over-eager pursuit of ascertaining your loyalty overshadowed my consideration of your feelings. It led to disastrous consequences, which I now regret.” Hannibal casts his eyes down in a humbled expression, then glances up at Will again. “I hope you’ll forgive me.”

Will takes a large gulp of wine. Although the drink is sweet, it doesn't wash away the bitterness on his tongue.

"You did it even though we specifically agreed not to lie to each other anymore," he points out dryly.

"Yes, and for that, I am sorry."

Hannibal's eyes are trained on Will, not shying away even for a second. They're burning their way into Will's heart, determined to find the seedling of forgiveness they both know is growing deep inside.

Will shoves a big chunk of meat into his mouth to avoid having to respond. He wants to let Hannibal find that seedling and nurture it into a beautiful flourishing plant of absolution; to tell Hannibal that he's forgiven. Will would do all of this, hoping it's going to soften the betrayal he's going to deliver later. But if anything, Will knows that him being kind to Hannibal now is only going to make his next actions sting more.

Will is a killer and a traitor, but he's not *heartless*.

"Thank you for the gifts," is the reply he ultimately settles on, pulling a small smile on his face. "The whiskey is great, and the dogs loved the treats."

He lets the scarf and the watch speak for themselves.

"You are very welcome, Will."

Hannibal returns the smile. In his mind, Will accepting the apology gifts must equate to accepting the apology itself, and Will being here must mean he is willing to give Hannibal another chance. Will doesn't have the heart to correct his misconception. Maybe he is heartless after all.

He chips away at his meal faster than ever before. Will has always found it extremely soothing to dine with Hannibal. The food is delicious, and if he intentionally ignores the fact that it's made of people, it's guilt-free too. It's not that Will actively enjoys acts of cannibalism, he's simply indifferent towards them. But today is different, filling him with a novel motivation for consuming what's on his plate. Because this time Will is not eating just for the sake of eating, he's *eating the evidence*.

He should eat it all. All of the crimes Hannibal committed against humanity safely stashed away in Will's belly, and the only way Jack Crawford can get to them is over Will's dead body. He should eat until there's nothing left that could hurt Hannibal. He should eat until it no longer tastes like betrayal. Some people would take a bullet for their loved ones, but Will would chew and swallow it.

Would Hannibal do the same for him?

Will doesn't know. And he's afraid that he wouldn't find out until it was too late.

The sound of a chair being pushed back interrupts Will's thoughts. "I need to check on our dessert," Hannibal tells him, rising from his seat. "I'll be just a moment."

And here it is, the opening Will has been dreading all night. With Hannibal out of the room and some meat still on Will's plate, it's the perfect opportunity to slip a piece into the little ziplock bag in his pocket.

It doesn't count as betrayal if he leaves the last piece uneaten. It doesn't count as betrayal if he takes the piece home. It will only amount to a betrayal if he hands it to Crawford. The actions preceding it will only matter if Will sees the plan through to the end.

No harm done. Not *yet*.

Will quickly but carefully wraps up the last slice of meat and tucks it into his pocket.

When Hannibal returns, he informs Will that dessert will be ready soon and takes away his empty plate. If Will had hesitated, he would've missed the opportunity forever. Part of him wishes he did.

The dessert course, consisting of homemade green tea ice cream with some fancy sauce the name of which Will won't even attempt to pronounce, goes by in a haze. The taste is wonderful on his tongue, but his mind is racing too much to fully appreciate it. His fingers and palms feel like they're *burning*; the punishment for committing something unforgivable. Will grits his teeth and presses his hands flatter around the cold bowl of ice cream.

Once they are done with dinner, Will fully expects Hannibal to suggest a nightcap in his lounge room by the fireplace. It's the spot they spent many nights in at the beginning of their relationship, having wonderful conversations about the workings of the world and falling harder and harder for each other with every passing hour. It would be very Hannibal-like to bring Will back to the spot associated with bonding and comfort, hoping that Will is going to subconsciously want to chase that feeling and mend their relationship. And if Will's real reason for being here was to give Hannibal another chance, he would have gladly let himself be manipulated in that way. It'd be for the best, for both of them.

However, to Will's big surprise, instead of the lounge room, Hannibal gravitates towards the foyer. Will follows, his mind suddenly buzzing with theories of what it means. Maybe Hannibal wants to respect Will's decision of keeping his distance for now. Maybe he wants to leave it up to Will to re-initiate their closeness when Will is ready.

The thought of that makes Will's heart fly high like a white dove. The realisation that it's never going to happen shoots it back down.

Hannibal stops by the coat rack, very subtly so, but the implied message isn't lost on Will.

"Thank you again for agreeing to join me tonight, Will. It means a lot to me," he says, his voice but a soft murmur and yet infused with so much genuine gratitude.

So many words instead of simply saying *I miss you*.

“Thank you for dinner, it was lovely,” Will replies.

Even more words instead of simply saying *I miss you too*.

Hannibal retrieves Will’s coat and helps him into it, neither of them uttering another word. Will’s feet hesitate before stepping outside, past the threshold of Hannibal’s home. His hand lingers on the doorframe.

“Hannibal?”

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Why should Will be any different? Hannibal’s eyes widen in mild surprise when Will surges forward and crashes their lips together.

The next sound is the click of the front door latching shut behind them. Or the squeak of Will’s shoes against the polished floors when Hannibal’s arms pull him close. Or the cabinet creaking as Will pushes Hannibal against it. It doesn’t matter because no one is there to hear it; they’re consumed by each other to the point where the rest of the world fades away.

Hannibal kisses Will again. And again. And again. And every time, Will lets him.

Each press of their lips together, each swipe of tongue, and each playful bite remind Will that they *shouldn’t*. Together they make up a warning sign adorned with neon lettering and flashing lights, standing tall on the side of a highway. Impossible not to see.

Will pinches his eyes shut and hits the gas.

He’s only human after all.

Hannibal’s lips are under the collar of his shirt, his hands cupping Will’s crotch. Will can’t resist bucking his hips for more friction. His hands find their way to Hannibal’s perfectly ironed slacks, slipping under the waistband with the ease of someone who has done this a thousand times before.

The truth is, he hates Hannibal only half as much as he hates himself. And he wants Hannibal twice the amount.

Will’s feet leave the ground. He’s in the air, supported solely by Hannibal’s strong arms around his waist. Weightless. Floating. Levitating. Will feels dizzy in the most wonderful way. Is this what it feels like to be in lo—

Hannibal sets Will down on top of the cabinet, sitting with his legs pushed apart and Hannibal slotted between his thighs. They pause for a moment, panting heavily and simply admiring each other. Two wild beasts circling each other before delving in with their teeth and claws, itching to ravage and devour one another until there’s nothing left. No pulling back. No holding back. Will is going to set Hannibal’s whole world on fire and watch it turn to ash, so can he really fault himself for wanting to be with the man one last time?

The next second Hannibal is on him again, ridding Will of his shirt and cupping Will’s hardening cock, with his bare hand this time without all the layers in between. Will moans, with the pitch and cadence of it signalling that he wants more and he wants it *now*. With the

speed things are going, they may not even make it out of the room. They'll make love here in Hannibal's foyer, against the big wooden door separating Hannibal's sanctuary from the rest of the world. The big wooden door that keeps screaming at Will that he should leave now, before it's too late.

It's what makes Will hesitate. Not because he knows he should go, but because he realises that if this is the last time he gets to see Hannibal, to *touch* Hannibal, he wants it to be one worth remembering forever.

"Hannibal... Take me to bed," Will whispers, and the amount of pent-up longing he harbours makes his voice shake.

Hannibal does exactly as asked. How could he not when Will's request sounds like his dying wish? He's determined to win Will back – hence the dinner and the gifts – so when Will asks him for something with his voice full of yearning, clutching to Hannibal as if his life depended on it, there is no way Hannibal can refuse. And the worst thing is that Will knows this. Knows that in this moment he is Hannibal's weakness. Knows he shouldn't do this, that he should stay as far away as he can from Hannibal to make it as painless as possible for them both. But he doesn't. He wraps his legs around Hannibal's waist and lets the man carry him upstairs.

Will is already a sinner. A betrayer and a traitor. *Selfish*. All because he wants to press his naked body to Hannibal's one last time, to feel loved one last time before he takes it all away. Because life is cruel and unfair and always about the survival of the *fittest*. He and Hannibal are two opposing forces, no matter how hard they have tried to be a unified whole. They can play house and forge peace, but that's all it'll ever be - play and forgery. There is no room for two rulers, two kings. One must always attain victory over the other.

And it's not even that Will *wants* to win. This is no winning, no triumph. It's about survival, and even barely so.

Will's hands are quick and determined, getting rid of his and Hannibal's clothes so fast it's as if they're going to burn their skin if left on for a second longer. He can hear himself begging; it's far easier to let rivulets of *'please'* and *'I need you, Hannibal'* leave his mouth than it is to let tears of desperation leave his eyes. He hopes Hannibal can read between the lines and understand what this is all about.

Will hopes, but at the same time he fears it too.

"Hush, darling," Hannibal murmurs, his face against Will's neck and his arms around Will's body. "I've got you."

Will holds him tighter and wishes it was true. He wishes that Hannibal's arms were a safe place and that Hannibal could take care of him. He wants it, with every cell of his body and every twisted thread of his blackened heart. And he can tell Hannibal wants it too.

But happy endings don't exist for men like them.

Hannibal eases their interlaced bodies down with unbelievable gentleness, Will's back against the soft sheets of Hannibal's bed. When Hannibal's mouth wraps around the head of Will's cock it feels like nothing short of *worship*. Hannibal as a devoted acolyte, determined to appease his god in the hopes of preventing the wrath that's about to be unleashed upon the world. And Will, the cruel and tempestuous god, who, despite Hannibal's best and most sincere efforts, decides to destroy their world anyway.

There is no rough edge to the way Hannibal handles Will, not today. No assertion of dominance or undercurrents of violence. Only loving touches and untarnished intentions. He holds Will's hips in place with a firm but tender grip, and his mouth pleasures Will in a way that brings pure bliss. It's incredible how Hannibal can sense exactly what Will needs right now and deliver it with ultimate perfection. Almost as if they were made for each other.

No. Will doesn't want to think about that. He *cannot* think about that.

He's made up his mind, and there is no going back. He'll carry out what he's planned and he will bear the consequences of his actions, no matter how disastrous and painful they will be. He knows with absolute certainty that he will regret it later and wish he didn't destroy the only good thing in his life. And that, too, is a choice Will has already made.

He asks Hannibal to make love to him like there's no tomorrow.

No matter how good Hannibal makes him feel, Will won't be swayed. He doesn't change his mind when Hannibal holds his legs apart and pushes in, making a place for himself inside Will's body. He doesn't change his mind when Hannibal starts moving, purposefully brushing the sweet spot in a way that makes Will arch and moan Hannibal's name. He doesn't change his mind when Hannibal touches him, gripping Will's cock in an intoxicating way that makes his nerves sing. He doesn't change his mind when they gaze into each other's eyes, foreheads pressed together and hearts intertwined.

Through it all, Will's resolve stays strong like the coastal bluff, made to withstand the burdens life bestows upon it. But Hannibal is the raging sea, and nothing erodes the bluff faster than the sea. The never-ending rhythmic movement of the waves against the rock chipping away tiny pieces of sand every time is no different to the never-ending movement of Hannibal's body against Will's chipping away at Will's resolve.

It would be so easy to crumble, to surrender to Hannibal's allure and let himself be swept away by the waves. The sea would be his home, and it would also be his grave. Maybe he should. Maybe he should tell Hannibal everything now when Hannibal is sheathed in him and it's clear to them both that they've never been this connected before - mind, body and soul?

Hannibal would be kind. He would bring Will to completion before killing him. It would be quick and painless; a death for the sake of *mercy*, not for the sake of fulfilling Hannibal's sadistic pleasures or twisted sense of justice. He would hold Will in his arms right til the end. Hannibal wouldn't be celebrating victory over a lover-turned-enemy. He would be *mourning*. The moment Will's heart ceased beating is the moment a part of Hannibal's heart would cease to exist too.

It feels like an awfully fitting ending for people like them. Gruesomely poetic. Romantically tragic. Like Romeo and Juliet of the twenty-first century. Will would welcome it. All he needs to do is confess, to come clean about the deal he made with the FBI. It would be so easy, it *should* be, but Hannibal's touch feels so heavenly that Will can't bring himself to interfere. Hannibal doesn't stop until Will is an incoherent mess of lust. He spears and shatters Will's body, then pours his care and affection into the cracks, causing flowers to sprout out of the fractures and fill them with beautiful bloom. His nails against Will's nipples set Will's chest on fire, burning away the skin, flesh and ribcage, until he gets to Will's heart.

Whatever confessions Will formulated in his mind die on his tongue. Hannibal's magic seeps into him, agitating the chemicals brewing under Will's skin. They ignite each other and go out like an enormous display of fireworks; a nuclear reaction that ends with them both shooting white and Will's mind forgetting all the plans and schemes until nothing but Hannibal remains.

For what feels like forever, Will floats in the air, his body feeling like it's been dissolved into specs of dust. Depleted. Spent. Erased from the world; his existence finally wiped away by an ever-powerful force that is Hannibal. And even though Will doesn't feel whole anymore, with parts of him scattered as far as the eye can see, Hannibal's influence doesn't stop. His presence pulls Will towards him, stronger than gravity itself, never letting go. Will comes back to himself, all his limbs miraculously intact, wrapped around Hannibal's soft and warm body. Will has had sex before, countless of times, but now he realises all those times amount to nothing in comparison to *this*.

"To think, even for a moment, that I would let you go," Hannibal whispers.

His words are sweet, but not without an undercurrent of threat running down below. His fingers are burrowed deep into Will's hair in a way that gently caresses his head, but can turn into a death grip in a matter of seconds. In the afterglow, Hannibal is showing his true colours, telling Will that leaving was never really an option. For all intents and purposes, Hannibal's words are a warning, but all Will hears is a promise.

Will laughs, bittersweet and with tears in the corners of his eyes. If only things were as simple as Hannibal chasing Will until he had nowhere left to go. As simple as Hannibal forcing Will to be with him, as if Will didn't already want it. As simple as Hannibal bending the entire universe to his will and proclaiming them as soulmates. If only.

"I am yours to mend," Will whispers back, "and you are mine to ruin."

Hannibal has got his claws deep in Will, but Will's hold on him is just as vicious. They're two eyes of the same storm, set to wipe out the entire world and each other in the process.

"Then why don't you ruin me, Will?" Hannibal asks, his intense hazel irises meeting Will's treacherous blues.

The thing is, Will already has.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Valentine's day! What a day to post this angst filled chapter, hey?

End Notes

A standing shout out and a big thank you to my lovely beta [memequeen1127](#). Your feedback is invaluable ♥

Feel free to follow me on [twitter](#), I'm always looking for fellow Fannibals to talk to!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!